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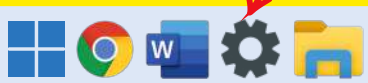

YOUR COMPLETE AI GUIDE

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NEVER USE

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PLUS

STOP USING NOTE APPS

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From the Editor

I think most people view AI as they did the internet back in the late 90s. They're intrigued and excited by its potential, but confused too. They realise there are some fantastic tools to master, but also plenty of dross to avoid.

That dross has a name: 'AI slop'. Robert Irvine explains what it means in his excellent Cover Feature, where he recommends the best 20 tools to use, and another 20 that are total rubbish. The latter includes the Chinese chatbot DeepSeek. It looked promising back in January, but there have been far too many privacy red flags since.

My favourite chatbot is still ChatGPT, but I'm beginning to use Google Gemini and Grok too. And for creating images, I think Google's ImageFX has the edge over Opera's Aria. Upscayl is amazing too, while Grammarly could turn an illiterate blockhead into Shakespeare.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

• **PS:** We're now selling joint packs of the 2021 and 2022 Back Issue CDs – see www.snipca.com/54187.

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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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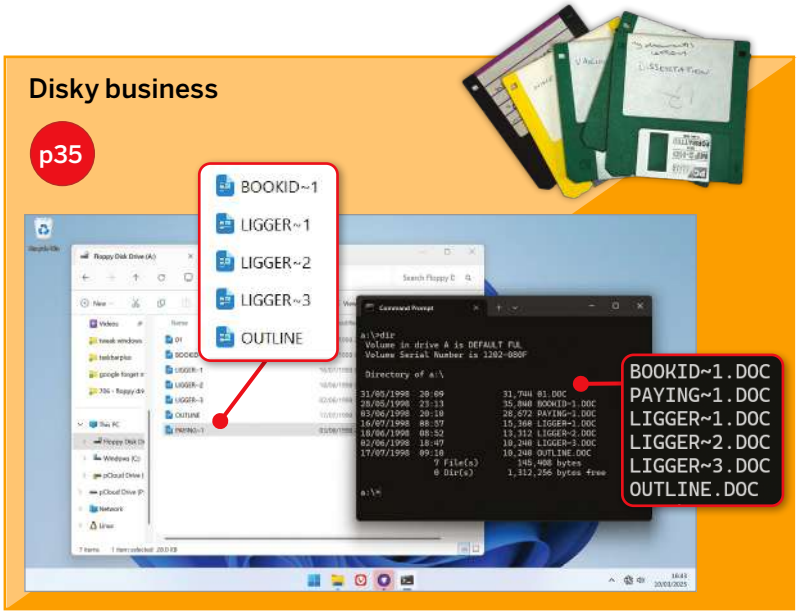


Microsoft breaks button that brings back old Outlook

The button that lets users switch back to the old 'Classic' version of Outlook is broken for some users, leaving them stuck on the new edition.

The error will frustrate those who find the new tool hard to use. Critics say it's too slow, is poorly designed and lacks many key features they like in the Classic version, including a unified inbox for multiple accounts.

Microsoft released the new Outlook in 2022 as an app on its Store (www.snipca.com/50772). It also gave those using the Classic version the chance to switch by clicking the 'Try the new Outlook' button at the top right of the tool.

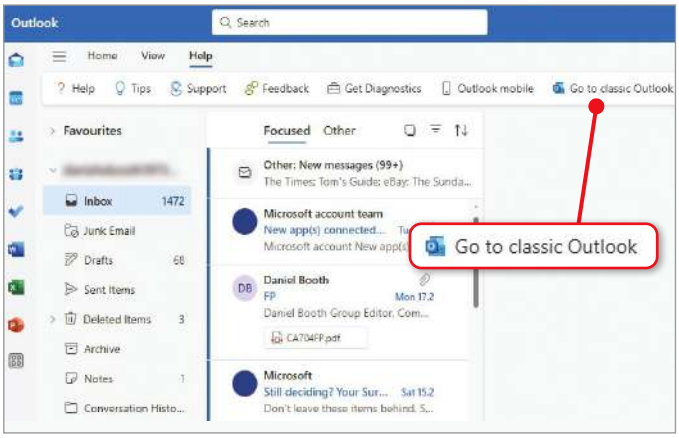
It then pre-installed the new Outlook on new Windows 11 computers, and made it part of the 23H2 update, released in October 2023.

In February this year, it added the new Outlook to Windows 10 as part of a compulsory update.

Microsoft wants the new Outlook to replace the many email options in Windows, including the Mail and Calendar apps, with a single tool.

WHAT WE THINK

This is more cock-up than conspiracy. Microsoft says it will release security updates for the old Outlook until "at least 2029" (see www.snipca.com/50756), so it won't be disappearing any time soon. It's unlikely to receive many new features during that time, but for many users (including us) that won't matter because it remains better than the new 'improved' version. Reinstalling it from the links Microsoft provides is definitely worth the hassle.



But throughout this period, it has given users the option to switch back to the old Outlook, most recently by adding the 'Go to classic Outlook' button in the Help menu (see screenshot).

This should open instructions on installing the old Outlook, but on 12 March Microsoft admitted Outlook "just closes" on some computers rather than being installed (www.snipca.com/54208).

Some users have reported being asked to fill in a form requesting details, but that doesn't help in installing the old version.

Microsoft says it's investigating the problem and has advised users who want to revert to the old version to install it using one of the two links at www.snipca.com/54211. These take you to the official download site for the tool, and also to the app's page on the Microsoft Store.

Easily draw straight lines in Snipping Tool

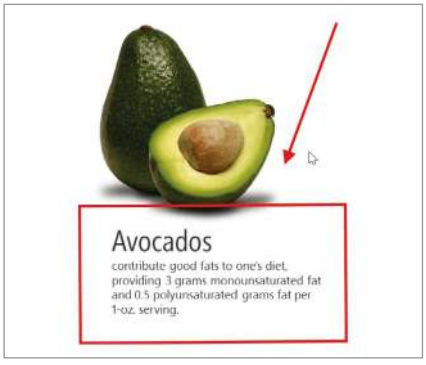
You'll soon be able to draw straight lines and shapes in Snipping Tool using the new 'Draw & Hold' feature.

It's available to Windows Insiders signed up to the Canary and Dev Channels, which is where Microsoft releases tools early for testing.

It revealed how it worked in a blog post (www.snipca.com/54212), showing a roughly drawn rectangle and arrow converted into neat and straight lines (see screenshot).

If you hold your cursor or digital pen (stylus) still for a moment, Snipping Tool will recognise that you want it to convert what you've drawn. You can resize, move or adjust your shape however you like, before clicking away to confirm the change.

The option is in version 11.2502.18.0 of Snipping Tool. Check which one you have by clicking the three dots top right, followed by Settings, then looking at the top right under 'About this app'.


Avocados
contribute good fats to one's diet, providing 3 grams monounsaturated fat and 0.5 polyunsaturated grams fat per 1-oz. serving.

You'll like this... Microsoft has released the first major update for Flight Simulator 2024 (www.snipca.com/54203)

but not this... Apple's AI called a Scottish gran a "piece of s***" (www.snipca.com/54202)

Apple launches fastest-ever iPad Air without price rise

Apple has released the fastest ever iPad Air at the same price as the previous model. The seventh-generation Air (pictured) costs £599 for an 11in screen and £799 for 13in (both 128GB), the same as the sixth generation launched last May.

There are also 256GB, 512GB and 1TB editions for both sizes, priced £699, £899 and £1,099 respectively for 11 inches, and £799, £999 and £1,299 for 13 inches (see www.snipca.com/54180).

But Apple has upgraded the processor from M2 to M3, claiming it's 12-15 per cent more powerful – and twice as fast as the M1 chip in the fifth generation from 2022.

Apple's M range of processors use the company's 'system on a chip' (SoC) technology to combine all the CPU, GPU, memory and other vital components on one chip.

The GPU built into the M3 is four times faster than the 2022 iPad Air, Apple claims, delivering "more accurate lighting, reflections, shadows, and extremely realistic gaming experiences".

The device works with Apple Intelligence, the company's range of AI features. These include the Clean Up tool for removing distracting elements in images, and "natural language search" that lets you search for photos and videos by describing them.

It also comes with ChatGPT, which you can use for free without creating an account.

The Air works with two new Magic Keyboards, with larger trackpads that add "greater precision for detail-oriented tasks". It costs £269 and £299 for the 11in and 13in models respectively.

Apple has also released a new version of the standard iPad, which is the 11th generation. It costs £329, £429 and £629 for 128GB, 256GB and 512GB respectively from www.snipca.com/54181.

We'll review both new iPads soon.

BBC iPlayer finally comes to Google's TV Streamer

Google has finally added BBC iPlayer to its TV Streamer device (pictured) six months after launch.

Anyone with a TV Streamer can now download the iPlayer app through their device or from the Google Play Store.

It comes with 4K, letting you watch BBC shows that are broadcast in Ultra HD – see the full list at www.snipca.com/54150.

BBC One and Two have also been added to the TV Streamer's Channels tab, making it easier to switch to live content.

The TV Streamer, Google's replacement for Chromecast devices, launched in September without the iPlayer app due to what the BBC called a "technical issue".

This probably referred to the fact that it hadn't passed the BBC's strict compatibility tests to guarantee the iPlayer works on it.

In Issue 705 (page 7), we reported that Google had axed its Chromecast devices before adding the iPlayer to the TV Streamer.

At £99 the TV Streamer is almost three times the price of 'Chromecast with Google TV' (£34.99), but it has four times the storage (32GB). And unlike the Chromecast dongles, it's a set-top box that sits beside your TV.

Buy the TV Streamer from Google's UK store at www.snipca.com/53996. You can pay the full amount in one go or £33 a month over three months.

Which TV streaming device do you use – and why? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

CHECK YOU'VE GOT RIGHT PART AT iFIXIT

Repair website iFixit (www.ifixit.com) has launched a 'compatibility checker' to help you buy the correct tech part. Find the part in question, then click 'Compatible with your device?' and select your device. You'll see one of three results: green 'This fits' (pictured), brown 'This might fit' and red 'This does not fit'. Read more at www.snipca.com/54163.

MORE BRITS USING W11 FOR FIRST TIME

For the first time more people in the UK are using Windows 11 than 10. Figures from StatCounter for February show the latest operating system running on 50.49 per cent of PCs, just ahead of its predecessor on 48.11 per cent (see www.snipca.com/54167). Microsoft will end support for Windows 10 on 14 October.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Scientists at Baltimore's Johns Hopkins University have built a prosthetic hand that mimics human hands to pick up objects of different shapes, sizes and textures, such as balls, plastic cups and teddy bears (pictured). It can even shake hands without crushing every bone in your fingers. Watch it in action at www.snipca.com/54152.

Credit: Johns Hopkins University

IN BRIEF

LISTEN TO PODCASTS WITHOUT AN ACCOUNT

You can now listen to podcasts on Pocket Casts without creating an account. It applies to the online podcast player (https://play.pocketcasts.com) and the player you can download to your PC. Creating a free account gives you features such as syncing playback across devices. Read more at www.snipca.com/54160.

GOOGLE REMOVES MALICIOUS MONEY APP

Google has removed a malicious app offering financial advice after it had been downloaded more than 100,000 times from its Play Store. The app, called 'Finance Simplified', is part of the SpyLoan family of malware that traps people into high-interest loans, then steals private data and uses it to blackmail them into paying. Read more at www.snipca.com/54135.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

These devices are fluent in 'gibberlink', the language AI assistants use when talking to each other. One phones the other asking to book a hotel for a wedding. They realise they're both AI, then resort to bleeps bringing to mind the good old days of dial-up (www.snipca.com/54141). And not a human in sight.

Apple takes legal action against Govt for backdoor order

Apple is taking legal action in an attempt to overturn a demand by the UK government to view its customers' private data if needed.

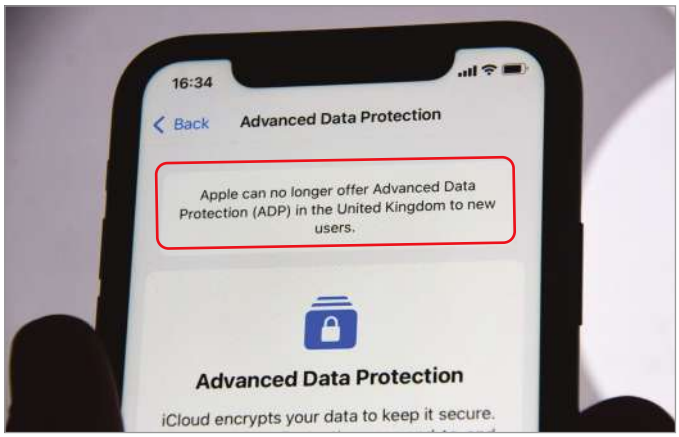
It has appealed to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, an independent court with the authority to investigate claims against the Security Service.

It follows Home Office demands in January that Apple allow security officials to access the encrypted data of Apple users if there's a national-security threat.

Apple could have created a 'backdoor' into its services for the Government to access private files, but instead turned off Advanced Data Protection (ADP, pictured). This uses end-to-end encryption to ensure no one except the user can open files.

With ADP disabled, Apple would be able to access files saved to iCloud if legally ordered to do so.

Apple said it was "deeply disappointed that our customers in the UK will no longer have the option to enable Advanced Data Protection (ADP), especially given the continuing rise of data breaches and other threats to customer privacy" (www.snipca.com/54017).


16:34
Back
Advanced Data Protection
Apple can no longer offer Advanced Data Protection (ADP) in the United Kingdom to new users.
Advanced Data Protection
iCloud encrypts your data to keep it secure.

It added that it will never build a backdoor into any of its products or services.

The Government's demand to Apple has been criticised by President Trump. He told *The Spectator* magazine that it's "something you might hear about with China".

The Home Office has refused to confirm or deny that it ordered Apple to provide access to users' files. It can't by law be made public.

However, a spokesperson said: "The UK has robust safeguards and independent oversight to protect privacy and privacy is only impacted on an exceptional basis, in relation to the most serious crimes and only when it is necessary and proportionate to do so."

• **How to encrypt your files – page 62**

BT to keep its name to please older customers

BT has scrapped plans to replace its name with EE when selling broadband and mobile packages to consumers, fearing it would alienate older customers.

The company said in 2022 that it wanted EE to be its "flagship brand", and only use BT when selling services to companies. It wanted to prioritise the EE brand because it has a good reputation for reliable signals and is popular across different age groups.

But BT Chief Executive Allison Kirkby, who's been in the role since February 2024, wants the company to return to its traditional products and branding.

A report in the *Telegraph* claimed Kirkby had "shelved" the previous rebranding strategy. It suggested she was concerned that older broadband and landline customers didn't want to lose the familiarity of the BT name.

It means BT and EE will continue to exist side by side when offering consumer broadband.

The report also said Kirkby will increase investment in Plusnet, which offers cheaper broadband than BT. This would mark a strategic change following years of BT scaling back what Plusnet offers customers, such as axing TV services in 2021 and mobile in 2024.

The *Telegraph* indicates BT will launch a budget mobile brand, although it didn't say whether this would be a new brand or a relaunch of Plusnet mobile.

Check if your email is among 284 million new hacked accounts

You can check whether your password is in a new database of 284 million stolen accounts uploaded online.

The records have been analysed by security expert Troy Hunt, who added them to his website Have I Been Pwned.

He wrote that he found them on the privacy-focused messaging app Telegram after being tipped off by an unknown government agency (see www.snipca.com/54064).

Hunt said the files, called ALIEN TXTBASE, totalled 1.5TB of data, and had 23 billion rows of information, with 493 million unique website and email address pairs, affecting 284 million unique email addresses.

He's also added 244 million new passwords to Have I Been Pwned, and "updated the counts" of another 199 million existing passwords, which means recalculating how many times they appear in stolen records.

';--have i been pwned?
Check if your email address is in a data breach
1
@hotmail.com
2
pwned?
Pwned in 7 data breaches
3
Oh no — pwned!
Pwned in 7 data breaches and found no pastes (subscribe to search sensitive breaches)

Troy confirmed their authenticity by checking whether attempting to reset a password using the email addresses triggered a password-reset response.

In total Hunt added 284,132,969 records. To search them – and the other 14 billion accounts on the site – visit https://haveibeenpwned.com then type your email address (1 in our screenshot) and click 'pwned?' 2 or press Enter.

If your email has been stolen ('pwned') then you'll see a message in red below telling you how many times 3. Scroll down and you'll see which security leaks contain your email. If not, you'll see the message 'Good news – no pwnage found!'.

To check your passwords visit https://haveibeenpwned.com/Passwords then type your password and press Enter.

Have I Been Pwned can notify you when your email address appears in a new data breach. Click 'Notify me' at the top, then enter the email address you want it to alert you about.

BT tells small firms to ditch the landline

BT has urged the 22 per cent of small businesses who still use landlines to upgrade to digital up to a year before the old phone network is switched off on 31 January 2027.

It said these businesses regard themselves as "analogue" and still rely on traditional phone lines, physical filing systems, paper contracts and fax machines.

The figure comes from a national survey of small businesses commissioned by BT. It also found that 80 per cent of firms who have invested in new technology say it has given them a competitive advantage over rivals.

Kerry Small, Chief Operating Officer for Business at BT, said: "The UK's analogue copper telephone network has a proud history, but it's no longer up to the task for businesses."

"It's simply too risky to build the economy on a shaky foundation, and we're calling on all businesses to move before the end of 2025 – well ahead of the switch-off," she added.

The initial deadline for the switch-off was the end of 2025. BT extended this last year over concerns that the 1.8 million customers who rely on telecare devices – which typically use a landline – weren't ready to upgrade.

IN BRIEF

BELKIN'S NEW CHARGER HAS 11 PORTS

Belkin has launched a charger with 11 ports (pictured below) and a 150W Gallium Nitrate (GaN) processor inside, making charging faster and more efficient. There's a Gigabit Ethernet port, two HDMI 2.0, microSD and SD card slots, 3.5mm audio jack, a single USB-A port and four USB-C ports. It costs £190 from www.snipca.com/54059.

THUNDERBIRD SWITCHES TO MONTHLY UPDATES

Mozilla will now update the email client Thunderbird every month to match Firefox's schedule. The first monthly update was Thunderbird 136, released on 4 March, but you can choose to keep getting annual updates instead. Read how to switch between the two schedules at www.snipca.com/54060.

COREL LAUNCHES ONLINE DESIGN TOOL

Corel has released a new online graphic-design tool to rival the likes of Adobe Illustrator and Canva. Called CorelDRAW Go, the company claims it's "simple enough for beginners yet powerful enough for creators needing more creative control than basic design apps provide". It costs £8.99 a month or £95 a year, though there's a free 15-day trial. Read more on Corel's blog: www.snipca.com/54062.

When will you have to bin your Freeview aerial?

The BBC wants you to stream instead, but many problems remain

Public figures often struggle to speak in plain English, especially when describing technological change. Here's what BBC Director General Tim Davie (pictured below) told MPs in the Culture, Media and Sport Committee on 4 March: "Digging in purely on DTT is not where the BBC is. The BBC would like to be part of a proactive transition of the UK to fully digitised households."

Translated, Davie means that supporting services offering the Digital Terrestrial Television service Freeview, isn't the BBC's priority, and it wants to encourage viewers to switch to watching TV over broadband, particularly on Freely.

This is the strongest signal yet that long term the days of Freeview and its satellite cousin Freesat are numbered. Combined they still serve about 18 million households, but broadcasting's decision makers see them as dinosaurs waiting for the streaming asteroid. Why have a rusty aerial or dish stuck on your house, they ponder, when you could have high-speed fibre cables beam programmes directly to your TV?

Tim Davie wants the BBC to nudge viewers towards streaming without leaving anyone behind

Well, for one thing not everyone can get those lightning-fast cables. And even if they could, they might not want to pay extra to get speeds they don't need. Davie realises this. He stressed to MPs that the BBC is a "universal broadcaster" and insisted it won't abandon viewers who will be reluctant to switch.

But the BBC has a problem. Research commissioned by the Government predicts that by 2040 95 per cent of households will be able to stream TV, while 71 per cent will *only* watch TV this way.

Just under a quarter will be 'hybrid homes', getting TV both over the air and via broadband. That leaves five per cent (around 1.5 million households) relying on traditional broadcast TV. They're more likely to be aged over 75, living alone in rural communities and on low incomes. At some point the BBC will *have* to abandon those viewers, no matter how gradual the transition to streaming is.

BBC chair Dr Samir Shah, who also spoke to the Committee, said: "We need time to reduce the number of people who could be left behind, and then it will be a matter of judgement when we decide that we have done the best we can and then we switch."

The challenge for broadcasters, regulators and the Government is to manage the change as smoothly as the switch from analogue to digital signals between 2008 and 2012. That was backed by an extensive public awareness campaign – remember these adverts (www.snipca.com/54192)? When the final switch-off came (24 October, 2012) most people were prepared.

But switching off analogue signals wasn't difficult technically – it only required upgrading existing TVs, or installing set-top boxes. By contrast, the streaming revolution is a nationwide infrastructure project that needs miles of cables underground and a squadron of satellites overhead.

Another hurdle could be cost. Davie told MPs the BBC should spend licence-fee money on "making brilliant programming", not promoting a "switchover".

He also cast doubt on the potential of running a stripped-back 'nightlight' version of Freeview providing only essential channels like the BBC, ITV and news: "We have to decide and ensure that we are not running two expensive distribution systems, because that would hobble us."

All this suggests your Freeview aerial is safe for now. The Government and BBC seem miles apart, and beyond the flawed launch of Freely, there's been little serious thought as to how the UK will move en masse to streaming. Do not adjust your set just yet.

THE FACTS

- BBC Director General Tim Davie told MPs he's committed to streaming being the future of TV, but said he won't leave traditional viewers behind
- Research predicts that by 2040 95 per cent of households will be able to stream TV, leaving 1.5m homes watching traditional broadcast TV
- Around 16 million households still have Freeview, while two million have Freesat

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

PayPal scam emails from Docusign

What's the threat?

Scammers are sending fake PayPal emails from Docusign, a genuine service for securely signing, sending and managing documents that can be signed digitally. They do this by setting up a Docusign account and then using its templates to create what look like legitimate PayPal invoices.

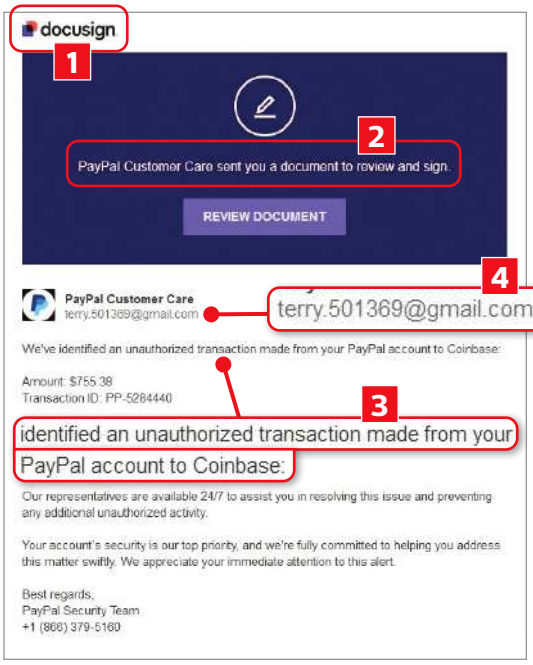
Because the emails are associated with a genuine Docusign account, they bypass many of the scam filters in email tools. The example spotted by security firm Malwarebytes has the real Docusign logo at the top left (1 in our screenshot) and uses the headline 'PayPal Customer Care sent you a document to review and sign' 2. It claims PayPal has "identified an unauthorized transaction" to Coinbase 3, which is a cryptocurrency trading site.

It urges you to phone PayPal's Fraud Prevention Team to "safeguard your account and process an immediate refund", but this takes you to the scammers.

How can you stay safe?

First, be aware that Docusign documents typically require a digital signature, so be suspicious about any that don't ask for one. You can check the authenticity of a Docusign document emailed to you by visiting www.docusign.com then clicking Access Documents at the top right and typing the security code that's in the email. If you get an error message, it means the document was removed or never actually even existed.

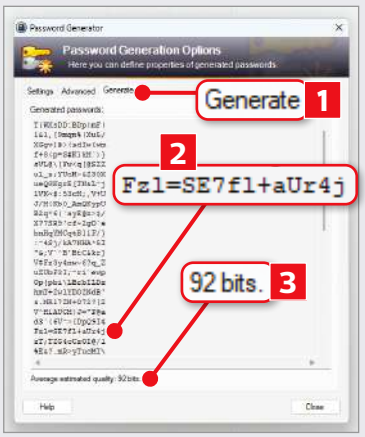
Also, PayPal emails come from paypal.com addresses, not the gmail.com address used in the scam 4, and they'll always address you by your first name. PayPal explains how to tell the difference between real and fake emails at www.snipca.com/54056.


docusign
1
2
PayPal Customer Care sent you a document to review and sign.
REVIEW DOCUMENT
4
PayPal Customer Care
terry.501369@gmail.com
terry.501369@gmail.com
We've identified an unauthorized transaction made from your PayPal account to Coinbase:
Amount: $755.38
Transaction ID: PP-5284440
3
identified an unauthorized transaction made from your
PayPal account to Coinbase:
Our representatives are available 24/7 to assist you in resolving this issue and preventing any additional unauthorized activity.
Your account's security is our top priority, and we're fully committed to helping you address this matter swiftly. We appreciate your immediate attention to this alert.
Best regards,
PayPal Security Team
+1 (866) 379-5160

Credit: Malwarebytes

New tools | Check password 'bits' in KeePass

It would take the average hacker 160 million years to crack the password Fzl=SE7fl+aUr4j in a brute-force attack. We know this because the new version of password manager KeePass (2.58) gives an "estimated quality" of passwords, measured in 'bits' of randomness. The password above is 92 bits. In contrast, a password comprising eight lowercase letters is 35 bits and would take less than an hour to crack.



To download the update, click Help at the top followed by 'Check for Updates'. Alternatively, click one of the Download buttons at https://keepass.info/download.html. Now open KeePass and click Tools at the top followed by Generate Password. Set the characters you want in a password (for example, upper and lowercase letters, digits and special characters) and its length.

Click the Generate tab (1 in our screenshot) and you'll see the passwords KeePass has created 2, and the average estimated quality at the bottom 3. Aim for a baseline of 80 bits, which would take 38 million years to crack.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

BP 'Car Emergency Kit'

I was minding my own business online a few days ago when I received an email supposedly from BP saying I'd 'been chosen to receive a brand new Car Emergency Kit'. It was headlined 'Answer & Win' and had a green button at the bottom saying 'Click Here To Claim'. The email had a BP logo, but didn't look especially professional. There was a photo of motoring equipment in the email, but I wasn't tempted – take a look at www.snipca.com/54021. It wasn't even a well-targeted email because I've just given up driving. Buck up your ideas, scammers!

Mark Lynham

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Microsoft is no longer a Teams player

Thanks for the article on Microsoft's big price increase for 365 (Issue 705, page 60). Microsoft has also made Teams (www.snipca.com/54119, pictured right) less attractive. I occasionally use it to dial into hospital trusts members' webcasts. This worked fine until recently when, after logging in, I was met with a banner telling me that some features and functionality were no longer available and I needed to revert to my previous version.

However, I could no longer see all the presentations during a webcast. It transpired that the version of Teams I had used for several years was no longer part of 365. I had been upgraded without my knowledge to Teams Free, which has limited functionality.

I further learned that presentations may not be visible because of the method used by the presenter, and that it would be up to me to tell them. But that's not really practical when there are over 100 people on a webcast.

Microsoft is not only increasing prices to add features many may not want, such as Copilot. They have also removed and hobbled programs that subscribers have been using. Perhaps the impact on Teams could be covered in another article?

Rod Broad

CA SAYS **We'll definitely cover Teams more, especially now that Microsoft is moving Skype users, along with all their contacts, to the tool (see page 20).**

My Sky bills have gone up 67%

Does Jonathan Edge (Letters, Issue 705) work for Sky? Don't tell me it's a good thing that Sky is raising its prices. Since March 2024 and up to June 2025, my TV, multiroom access, broadband and landline have gone up 67 per cent. I was paying £71.50 to start with, but my June bill will be £118.50. No sport, no Netflix, just their bog-standard package. I phoned for a reduction. They offered me Sky Glass (my current TVs are better than those), Sky Sports and Netflix. I couldn't get it through to them that I wanted to pay less, not more.

Graham Head

Most VPN-porn users are over 18

Rick Barrett is right to point out that VPN use has risen sharply in US states that have introduced age checks for porn sites (Letters, Issue 705). But it's hard to say how many people using VPNs are under-18. I suspect most VPN users are over-18s who simply don't want to enter their details into a porn site. I don't think we need to worry about that. The bigger challenge is to force VPNs to add age checks so children can't use them to bypass age restrictions.

John Rutherford

AI can't run on burger and chips

Issue 704 (page 49) warns that the next generation of AI, called 'human-level AI', threatens to replace us. While acknowledging this is a real threat, let's get some perspective. The human brain can run on burger and chips, and sits atop a body that's both mobile and dexterous.

AI meanwhile needs massive amounts of power, cooling, network bandwidth and space. Plus, to make it mobile, it would need a small nuclear reactor and a fleet of lorries. Oh, and it would need a small army of engineers to keep it running. I'll have a burger and chips, please.

Alan Thomas

CA SAYS **We can confirm that none of the AI tools we recommend in our Cover Feature (pages 50-57) are fuelled by burgers, but they all require chips – just not the greasy kind.**

Attempt to recover Bitcoin drive is 'lost' cause

Regarding James Howells' efforts to recover the hard drive containing £620m of Bitcoin (Issue 704, page 8), if I had spilled a drink on a hard drive I would have immediately dried it with a towel and taken it to the local computer shop for repair.

You use the word 'lost' three times in the article. My dictionary tells me that 'lost' means "unable to be found or recovered" and "no longer possessed or existing because of misfortune".

The first Bitcoin transaction in 2010 was for two pizzas at a cost of 10,000 Bitcoin (www.snipca.com/54085). At the time his 8,000 Bitcoin was only worth about $30, so therefore he has 'lost' only about this much. The current value of £620m is irrelevant because he no longer has the drive. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush: or a drive in the hand is worth £620 million, but nothing in the rubbish tip.

And who in their right mind would

What's the Issue...?

Issue 705's informative Cover Feature ('Hack your maps') reminded me of a feature recently explaining how to boost your privacy in Google Maps. When was it?

Nigel Fraser

CA SAYS **In Issue 696, page 62.**

I've just bought the Majority MP3 Player (www.snipca.com/51791) for my car, but can't find the How To you published on setting it up. Can you help?

Jim Hackett

CA SAYS **Yes, look in Issue 693, page 35.**

When did you review the iPhone 16? I'm tempted to switch from Android.

Kath Palmerston

CA SAYS **In Issue 695, page 25. Read it and the features above on our Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/53179.**

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invest in searching 100,000 tonnes of rubbish for a pocket-sized drive? In *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, backers prepared to finance a ship and crew to recover Captain Flint's legendary buried treasure, but what assurance did the backers have that this was not a fantasy?

I'd be prepared to bet good money that this drive will never be recovered, and certainly not within the next 10 years.

Brian White

If I was a billionaire I'd happily pay James Howells £620m myself just so I wouldn't have to keep reading about his desperate attempts to recover his Bitcoin. In fact, that suggests an answer to his problem. Why doesn't he start a crowdfund campaign promising to stop banging on about his plight if a certain target is reached? All we need is 620 million people pledging £1 each.

Martin Roach

Phones with screen flicker were making me feel sick

Thank you for Issue 704's feature (page 60) on how to deal with screen flicker (also known as pulse width modulation, PWM). I've had to return my last four Samsung phones due to eye strain and headaches. One of them was so bad I felt physically sick after using it for just 30 minutes. It's been incredibly frustrating, particularly because of my passion for technology and the desire to use the latest devices without experiencing physical discomfort.

I feel that if we don't make enough noise about this, people like myself will not be able to buy a Samsung, Apple or Google phone ever again. Raising awareness about the impact of PWM on users is crucial, and your support in this area is invaluable.

Ben Gransden

Resolver helped me get Amazon refund

I read with interest your response to Lindsay Markham's query about a missing Amazon parcel (Consumeractive, Issue 704, page 14). I had a situation (now resolved) which while not quite the same, suggests that Amazon's view on contracts may not be quite as suggested.

In mid-November 2024, I ordered a mobile phone from Amazon, which arrived as expected. It turned out to be faulty, so I decided to return it. But the only option we were given to return the phone was via UPS. With this in mind, we arranged for collection, handed over the package and accepted a receipt from the driver. Some days later, it became evident that Amazon had not received the package.

I was told by Amazon to wait 30 days, at which point they told me I was now responsible for dealing with the matter through UPS. I pushed back, but to no avail. I therefore processed a 'lost package search' with UPS, providing evidence and explanations. This was summarily rejected by them.

I then took up my case through Resolver (www.resolver.co.uk, pictured left), which deals with complaints against companies. It took some days but UPS accepted my claim and advised Amazon to refund me, which it did.

In all, this took over two months to sort out. I'm at a loss as to why I was held responsible for resolving this. I provided from the start all the evidence that Amazon needed. I'll think carefully in future before making a high-value purchase through them.

Andy Leaf

STAR LETTER

Apple is cynically calling the Government's bluff

Apple is behaving recklessly by turning off its Advanced Data Protection in iCloud, and yet it has the nerve to claim the moral high ground ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 705, pictured). The first duty of any Government is to keep its citizens safe, and it seems reasonable to ask Apple to provide access for messages that might threaten national security.

Question of the Fortnight
Why does the Govt want to access your private files?
It asked Apple to disable its most advanced security protection

Apple could have provided the 'backdoor' the Government was asking for with little fuss. But instead it has chosen to go further in what I believe is a cynical attempt to call the Government's bluff. Apple is implying that its ideological obsession with privacy is of greater importance than stopping terrorists who organise attacks and paedophiles spreading vile images of abuse.

It's obvious how this will play out. There will be some kind of privacy attack on Apple users that wouldn't have been possible when Advanced Data Protection was switched on. Apple won't explicitly blame the Government but will make some carefully worded statement that's the equivalent of 'I told you so'.

You have to remember that Apple is a colossal international company that hates being regulated. It's worth more than the economies of most countries. When you're that big, you think you can bully sovereign nations. Apple needs to backtrack soon or it could lose thousands of users furious about its arrogant stance.

Mel Chisholm

CA SAYS **Mel's right that some Apple users will be angry about the company's decision to axe Advanced Data Protection in the UK. But there's likely to be just as many concerned that the Government demanded access to files that were fully encrypted. Wherever you stand, it pays to encrypt your files to prevent them falling into the hands of hackers and scammers. We explain how to do this on page 62. Apple, meanwhile, is now taking legal action against the Government – see page 8.**

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Has Currys sold me a second-hand laptop as new?

LEAD CASE

Q I'm concerned that Currys has sold me a second-hand laptop as new. I bought a Lenovo Yoga 7 2-in-1 laptop from Currys (www.snipca.com/54091) at the end of December. When setting it up I discovered that it appears to have previously been set up, and Lenovo's warranty was for only seven months instead of a year. Neither Lenovo nor Currys is helping me, so can you?

John Barker

A We'll try, because there are several signs suggesting it's a second-hand laptop that Currys sold as new by mistake. If so, John is entitled to a full refund.

First, if the laptop has been set up before, it has definitely been used in some capacity. It may not have been owned by another customer, but John could certainly argue it's now second-hand.

John's suspicions were further fuelled when he took the laptop back to Currys and an assistant noticed it had been set up to 'Flip to boot'. This setting turns on the screen when you flip open the laptop (see www.snipca.com/54090). This isn't set by default, suggesting it's been activated by a previous owner.

But the biggest clue is the warranty. By law these begin on the day you receive the item. John says the warranty was registered in July, which would explain why five of the warranty's 12 months had already passed. However, Lenovo won't be to blame for this. The fault lies entirely with Currys, though Lenovo can help by investigating when this laptop was set up and by whom. This would give John some evidence to present to Currys.

This case needs unravelling, so we'll contact both companies and ask them what happened.

CASE ONGOING

Can retailers refuse to repair faulty devices?

Q I read Jenny Beady's case in Issue 704 and was surprised you said Lidl didn't have to repair the faulty lamp she bought. I thought the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) demanded that a retailer did this.

Mark Truman

A Retailers can refuse to repair a device if it's impossible or the cost is "disproportionate" compared with other solutions, such as a refund or replacement (see paragraph 23, subsection 3 of the CRA: www.snipca.com/54095). If a device has faults but can still be used, you can ask the retailer for a reduction in what you paid – this counts as damages, not a refund.

Within six months of purchase the retailer has to prove the item isn't faulty. After that, the onus falls on you to prove it *is*. Also within six months, refunds must be in full. After that the retailer can deduct money to reflect the time you've had it. If you believe it has reduced a refund by too much you should tell it so. If it doesn't agree you can report it to the Competition and Markets Authority online (www.snipca.com/54096).

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

Evri refunds reader and explains 20-parcel limit

Evri has refunded the money Amanda Checklin spent trying to dispatch 36 parcels, and told us why she was unable to scan all the QR codes needed to confirm the deliveries (see Issue 705). The courier said it has a limit of 20 parcels that individuals can send in one transaction. To increase this limit you need to have a business account.

Amanda, who works for a charity for rescued animals, had spent £181.70 to send the 36 parcels to auction winners. But she was left frustrated when she couldn't scan all the codes and eventually used another courier. Evri did refund her for four parcels, but ignored her requests for more refunds. She was still owed £160 when she contacted us.

To its credit, Evri responded within 24 hours to explain what had happened, though it didn't say why it had refunded some parcels but not others.

When booking an Evri courier you have to decide whether to print your delivery labels at home – you'll need Adobe Reader to do this. Alternatively, you can choose to print labels at ParcelShop. Evri will send you QR codes that you'll need to take to your local ParcelShop (find your nearest at www.snipca.com/54104). Scan these at the shop then print your labels. For more details visit www.snipca.com/54103.

Can Meta stop supporting the Facebook Portal?

Q I was given a Facebook Portal smart screen (pictured) for Christmas in 2022. It's an excellent piece of equipment that helps us communicate by video with our family. However Meta, which owns Facebook, has now withdrawn the app and will withdraw other features in April, rendering the device almost useless. I've complained to Meta, but can the company cease to support the Portal?

David Gibbs

A Yes, we're afraid it can. Companies can discontinue any product at any time, and don't have to give a reason. Tech companies are quick to axe products if early sales are poor. The Facebook Portal simply couldn't compete with more established devices like Amazon's Echo Show and Google's Nest Hub.

What's especially galling for David is that Meta said it was scrapping the Portal in June 2022, six months before he received it as a present. By law, whoever was selling the Portal should have mentioned in the listing that it was discontinued. Lots of third-party sellers are still breaking the law by selling the device on Amazon without stating it's no longer supported.

We've asked David whether he knows where the Portal was bought from. If so, then he can ask the person who bought it to complain to the retailer. However, to get even a partial refund that person would need to prove the retailer hadn't mentioned the product being discontinued in its listing. We doubt they'll be able to do this after more than two years, but it's worth a shot.

CASE ONGOING

Is Ofcom's One Touch Switch working properly?

Q I've had nothing but problems switching my broadband contract using Ofcom's new One Touch Switch (OTS) process (www.snipca.com/54099). My contract with Virgin ended on 26 January and before this I signed a contract with TalkTalk for my new service to begin on 4 January. I received an email from Virgin confirming this, but continued to be billed by it. Virgin said the OTS had not been completed by TalkTalk.

Shay Kennedy

A Since contacting us Shay says Virgin has finally switched him to TalkTalk, but it was still billing him £72.50 a month. When he queried this it told him he had to pay £146 to end the contract early. Virgin said he had to pay until the end of March because he hadn't cancelled until mid-February.

The plot thickened when TalkTalk reimbursed Shay this money. This suggests it was at fault for not completing the switch in time. We'll check with Virgin that it won't keep billing him.

Under Ofcom's OTS system, all you need to do is tell your new provider you want to switch to them. They'll then contact your existing provider to arrange the move. But Shay was left in the dark because neither company told him the move hadn't been completed. We'll ask Ofcom and TalkTalk how this happened and what can be done to stop it in future.

CASE CLOSED

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

CyberPowerPC refunded me when price of my PC fell

One of the most impressive signs of good customer service is if companies are prepared to refund you if the product you buy suddenly drops in price soon after purchase. So full marks for CyberPowerPC for doing just that when I emailed them after spotting the PC I'd bought had been reduced by £100.

It was my third computer from CyberPowerPC and like the previous two it arrived the day after I had ordered it. They also set a high standard in communication. At every stage of your PC customisation they tell you exactly what you've done. They're transparent about when it will be sent and why there might be delays.

A couple of times I've added components that weren't compatible, but they warn you immediately so you don't make a mistake. I trust their expertise completely.

Clive Duncan

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
CyberPowerPC

- **Email** sales@cyberpowersystem.co.uk
- **Online** www.snipca.com/54107
- **Phone** 0333 323 7776

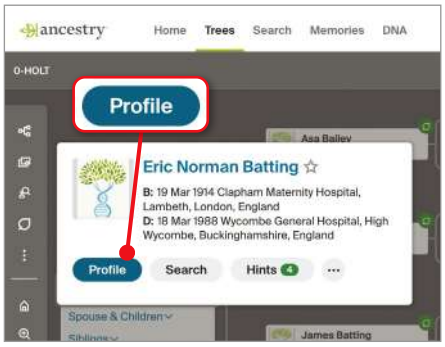
Grow Your Family Tree

You don't need a subscription to build a tree on Ancestry. So once you've done that, follow **Richard Holt's** instructions to...

Add events to ancestors' timelines

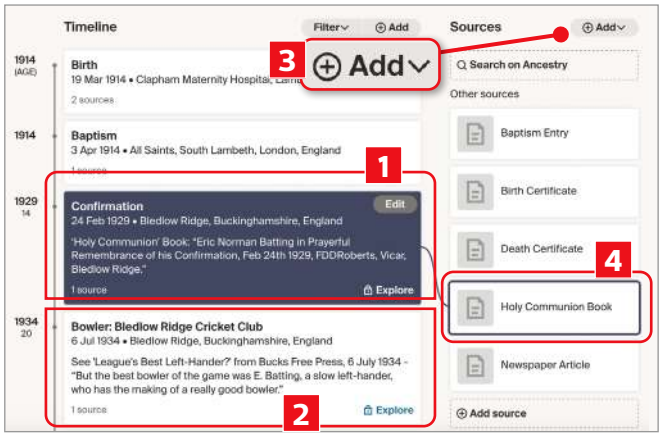
You might think you need to subscribe to Ancestry to access every feature, but this isn't the case. You need only a free account to build a family tree, and then add events to your ancestors' timelines. It's a great way to include more detail about their lives – beyond births, marriages and deaths.

If you don't have a free account, visit www.ancestry.co.uk then click 'Sign Up' at the top right and choose a method of signing in. When that's done, click the Trees tab at the top, followed by 'Start a New Tree'. You'll be prompted to search for a grandparent, but instead click 'Maybe later' at the bottom. Follow the instructions to add people to your tree, skipping steps if you don't need them.



Click a person's name followed by Profile

Add your sources and they'll be linked to the related information in your timeline



Choose an event or create your own

Once you've populated your tree, you can start adding events to your ancestors' timelines. Click a person's name then select Profile (see screenshot below left). On the next page click '+Add', then scroll down the menu and select an event – or create your own by choosing Custom Event.

I chose to work on my great-grandfather, Eric Norman Batting (1914–1988). I had already entered Eric's baptism into my tree, but wanted to add the inscription from his 'Holy Communion' book: "Eric Norman Batting in Prayerful Remembrance of his Confirmation, Feb 24th 1929, FDDRoberts, Vicar, Bledlow Ridge." I chose 'Confirmation' in the dropdown menu, then added details in the box that appeared. I then clicked 'Add' and the event appeared in Eric's timeline (1 in our screenshot above).

I also know that my great-grandfather played for Bledlow Ridge Cricket Club in High Wycombe. I have a clipping from the *Bucks Free Press* newspaper dated 6 July 1934 which reads: "But the best bowler of the game was E. Batting, a slow left-hander, who has the making of a really good bowler." I added this by selecting Custom Event from the menu and typing 'Bowler: Bledlow Ridge Cricket Club' in the 'Fact label' box. This information appeared below the details of his confirmation 2.

Add sources to your tree

It's always important to add sources for the information in your tree. Do this by clicking '+Add' 3 to the right of Sources, then choose 'Add source' or 'Add web link'. I selected 'Add source' and was presented with three questions about where the information came from and what it told me.

The last part of the form allows you to select the facts or events that the source citation relates to. This then links the source to those events on the person's timeline 4. You can click on each event to see which sources provided the information.

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

I think I've got at least three English ancestors who worked as midwives going back 130 years. I'd like to confirm this, but don't know whether any records would help me. Do they go back this far?
Pete Vincent

Yes they do, thanks to the creation in 1903 of the Central Midwives Board for England and Wales. This regulated the certification and examination of midwives. If you qualified you were listed on the Midwives Roll. Ancestry has these records for between 1904 and 1959. Visit www.snipca.com/54115 then search by names, addresses and – if you know them – their enrolment dates.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Search for metalworker ancestors

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

WEB BROWSER

Firefox 136

www.snipca.com/54189
What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux

Firefox may no longer receive the same level of attention as Chrome and Edge, but it's still the best and most popular alternative to Chromium browsers. Its powerful privacy features automatically block third-party cookies and other trackers, and it will continue to support Manifest V2 extensions – such as uBlock Origin – for the foreseeable future.

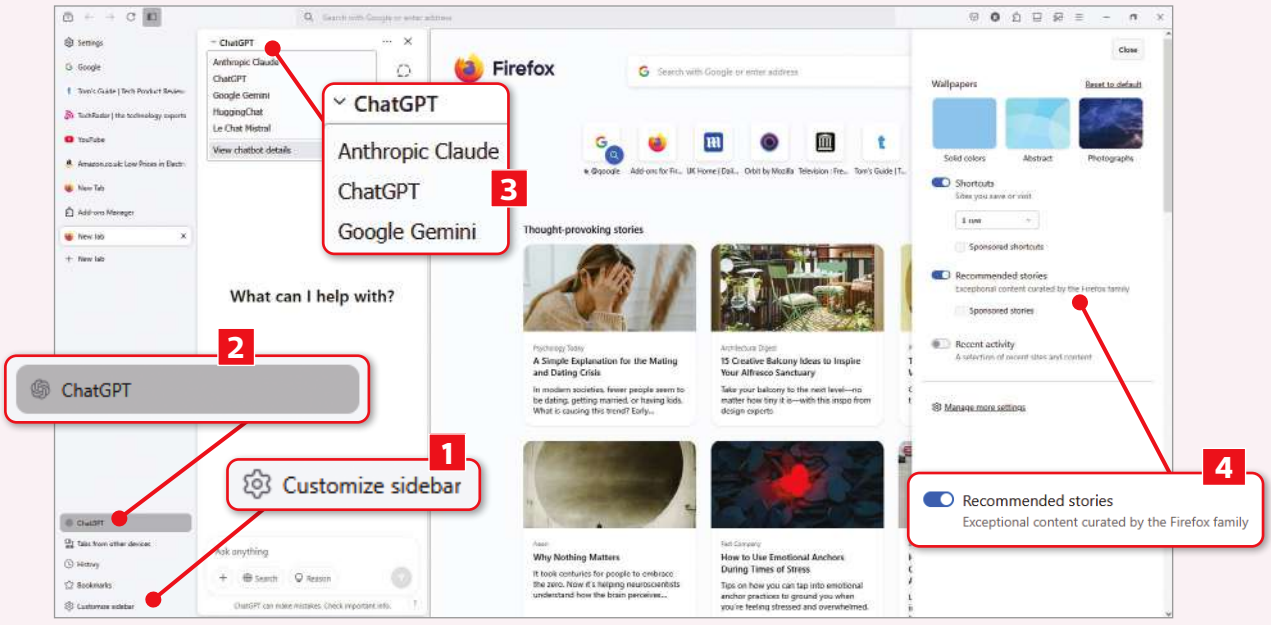
Firefox 136 is a major update that introduces a host of useful features and improvements. The most notable is Vertical Tabs, which moves the tab bar from across the top of the browser to down the left-hand side. To activate the option, right-click the main toolbar and choose 'Turn on Vertical Tabs'.

Vertical Tabs saves you having to move your cursor upwards every time you want to switch tabs or open a new one. It also prevents the titles of tabs from becoming squashed and unreadable when you have lots of pages open.

The feature works in tandem with Firefox's updated sidebar, which gives you instant access to a range of tools without taking you away from the current page. Open it by clicking the 'Show sidebar' button on the toolbar or by pressing Alt+Ctrl+Z. When using Vertical Tabs, click the button again to expand the sidebar and show full tab titles.

Mozilla has boosted the browser's security by enabling HTTPS-First by default. This automatically connects to web pages using encrypted HTTPS, and only falls back to less secure HTTP if the secure connection fails.

Firefox now uses the PNG format when you copy images from web pages to programs outside the browser, to allow the "preservation of transparency". It has also updated its Clear History feature to let you delete saved data from online forms without wiping your browsing history. Another new option is a Weather widget on your New Tab page, but this is rolling out gradually so you might not see it yet.



1 Firefox's new Vertical Tabs feature displays your tabs on the left-hand side of the browser rather than across to the top. To show them on the right instead, click 'Customize sidebar' and choose 'Move sidebar to the right'.

2 The sidebar also lets you view your History, Bookmarks, synced tabs from other devices and a choice of AI chatbots. Click the name of the chatbot (in this case ChatGPT) to start a conversation without leaving the current page.

3 You can switch to a different chatbot using the dropdown menu at the top of the sidebar. As well as ChatGPT, options include Google Gemini, Anthropic Claude and Hugging Chat. See our Cover Feature on page 50 for more about AI tools.

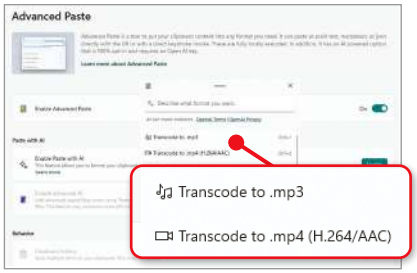
4 If you don't want to see 'Thought provoking stories' on your New Tab page, it's easy to hide them. Click the 'Personalize New Tab' cog in the bottom-right corner and switch off 'Recommended stories'. You can also hide 'Recent activity'.

SYSTEM TOOL

Microsoft PowerToys 0.89

www.snipca.com/54179

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



The latest version of PowerToys improves its Advanced Paste tool, which pastes content you copy to your clipboard in the format of your choice. Although primarily aimed at software developers, allowing them to quickly paste plain-text, markdown and JavaScript code, it now offers the universally useful ability to convert audio and video files into MP3 and MP4 format.

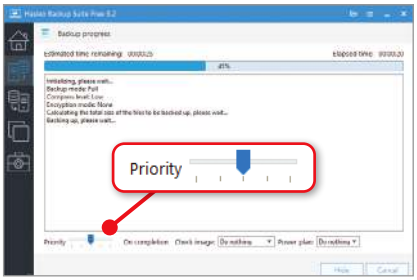
Select 'Enable Advanced Paste' in PowerToys Settings, then press Windows key+Shift+V to open its window. When you copy content to your clipboard, Advanced Paste's list of actions will update accordingly. These now include 'Transcode to .mp3' and 'Transcode to .mp4' (see screenshot). Select one to convert the content and paste the result in the source folder. You can also extract text from screenshots, by choosing 'Image to text', then Paste.

BACKUP TOOL

Hasleo Backup Suite 5.2

www.snipca.com/53669

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11



This excellent free backup software has received several updates since we last wrote about it (Issue 703, page 18), to make your backups even smoother. It now lets you adjust the priority of the backup process (see screenshot) to control the amount of system resources allocated to it. This can prevent backups from slowing your PC when you're performing other tasks – or make them faster during quiet times.

A new Hide button lets you minimise the backup-progress window to your system tray, and cancel the task from there by right-clicking the Hasleo icon. Another new option lets you select (or deselect) specific months when setting up a monthly backup schedule, so you can plan ahead for when you're away. Hasleo has also improved its compression tool to let you shrink your backups using three different compression levels.

£ SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

SIW Home

www.snipca.com/54188

Price: £16.05 per year **Free trial:** 14 days

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

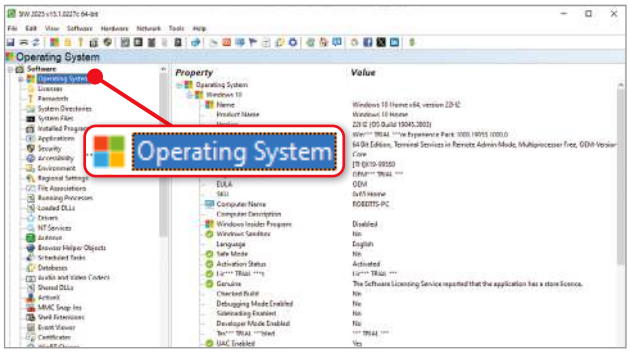
SIW (System Information for Windows) lets you view a huge amount of information about your PC's hardware, software and network connections in one place. It's been around for 20 years and was recently updated to support the latest Intel and AMD processors.

The interface has a tree-like structure, which makes it easy to explore details of different components on your computer. These include your motherboard, CPU, BIOS, memory, and sound, video and network adapters.

You can also view at-a-glance information about your operating system (see screenshot), such as the current version, installed programs, security settings and even your product keys. The level of detail is very impressive, especially for technically minded users, though some is hidden behind asterisks in SIW's free-trial version.

Less pleasing is the pause that occurs when you select certain categories, while SIW loads its information. This sometimes takes several seconds and can give the impression the program has crashed. We're also not keen on the main toolbar, which is crowded with tiny icons, including pointless buttons for sharing your endorsement of SIW on X, LinkedIn and Facebook.

We prefer the clearer and more modern presentation of the free system-information tool Glow (www.snipca.com/52993). This isn't as comprehensive as SIW but includes practical options for analysing your PC – such as benchmark tests.



OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

SIW is a great system-information tool and its licence price is reasonable, covering up to three PCs. But it's not as friendly and fast as the free alternative Glow, and may offer *too much* detail for the average home user.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

What can I use instead of Skype?

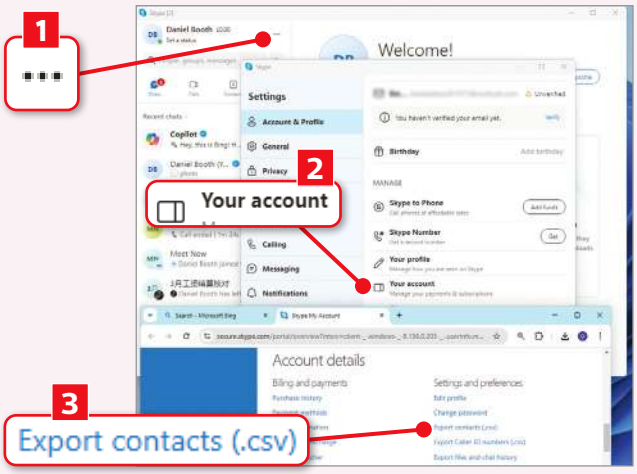
Q I've been using Skype to make video calls on my PC for over 10 years, so was rather shocked to hear that Microsoft is scrapping it on 5 May. What tool should I use now and can I move my contacts to it?

Phil Friar

A Microsoft wants you to use its Teams program, as it explains at www.skype.com/en, and will be giving all Skype users the chance to move to the tool. Like Skype, you can make free video calls on Teams, send comments, share files and use it on multiple devices. Microsoft will be prompting Skype users to use Teams over the next few weeks.

Your previous chats and existing contacts will be waiting for you when you sign in, so switching to Teams will be the right choice for some users (see www.snipca.com/54026). However, it's been built more as a business tool for large teams to work on (hence the name) than casual users at home. As such, you might find it easier to use Google Meet (https://meet.google.com) or Zoom (www.zoom.com).

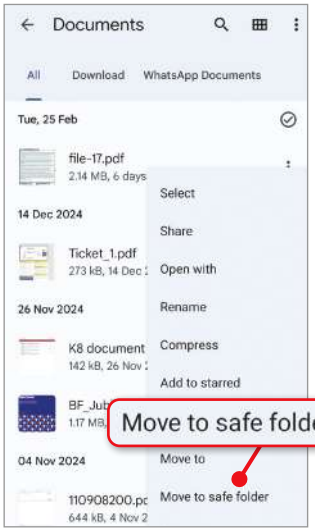
Our advice is to try Teams for a while to see if you like it. If not, switch to one of these rival tools. Microsoft lets you export your Skype chats, contacts and call history to add to another program, as explained at www.snipca.com/54029. For example, to export your Skype contacts as a CSV file, click the three-dot More button (1 in our screenshot), then Settings followed by 'Account & Profile' then 'Your account' 2. Now scroll down to the 'Settings and preferences' section, then click 'Export contacts (.csv)' 3.



Can I keep my Android files private?

Q Over the next few months I've got to share my Android phone with some work colleagues. I need to keep some personal files safe, and was wondering if there's an app that provides a virtual locker.

Derek Andrews



A There is – 'Files by Google' – and you may already have it installed. If not, install it from www.snipca.com/49612. Open the app, then tap 'Safe folder' under Collections and type a PIN you'll need to open it. Now find a file you want to keep private, then tap the three-dot menu button on the right followed by 'Move to safe folder' (see screenshot).

Can I increase the size of text on websites?

Q My eyesight is failing so I need a way to increase text size on websites I visit. I use the Chrome and Brave browsers. Is there a program I can use?

Kevin Burroughs

A Actually, rather than a program, try the browser extension Magnifying Glass (www.snipca.com/54020). Install it then click the extension's icon so it turns red (1 in our screenshot) then move the red circle across your screen 2. Right-click the icon followed by Options to change the pixels, zoom level and border colour.

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

HP's 15-minute 'on hold' delay for callers

Andy Warhol is often credited with predicting that "in the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes". He would have been just as prophetic claiming that "in the future everyone phoning HP's customer services will have to hold for 15 minutes".

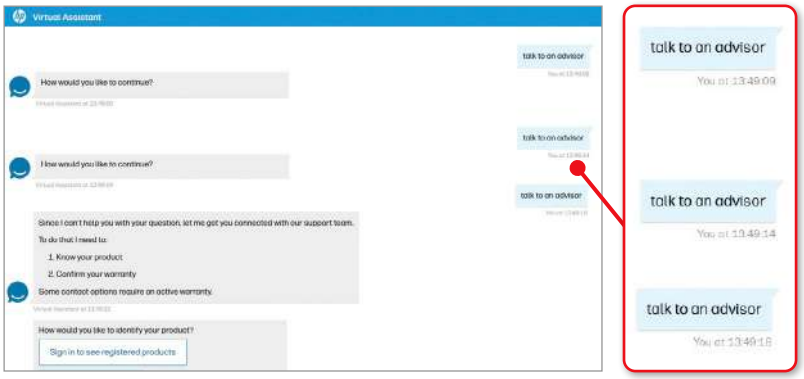
That's the length of time HP added to all phone calls from customers to deter them from phoning the company. According to an internal memo leaked to The Register website, HP wanted to encourage customers to "self-solve" their problems instead by looking for help on its website.

The automated message customers heard was: "We are experiencing longer waiting times and we apologise for the inconvenience. The next available representative will be with you in about 15 minutes."

HP justified this to staff as a way of saving money. And I'm sure in the short term it probably cut costs. But someone should explain to HP's bosses about false economies. Slashing customer services always backfires and is usually a sign of a company in trouble.

Predictably, HP scrapped the policy within days of its exposure, which had triggered a furious backlash. It now claims "speaking to live customer service agents in a timely fashion is paramount". Fine, but we all know it only changed course because it got caught.

If you do need HP's help, first find your product's serial number at www.snipca.com/54043 then phone 0207 949 0416. You could also try its virtual assistant at www.snipca.com/54044, though it takes perserverance to convince it you want to speak to an actual human. We asked to "talk to an advisor" three times (see screenshot) before it finally got the message.


Virtual Assistant
How would you like to continue?
talk to an advisor
talk to an advisor
talk to an advisor
How would you like to identify your product?
Sign in to see registered products
talk to an advisor
talk to an advisor
talk to an advisor

Get the message HP? We want to talk to an advisor

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Amazon on creating a 'learning culture' www.snipca.com/54045

"Let's talk feedback. But not that traditional HR-approved, sandwich-method where criticism is buried in praise, that leaves you feeling like you ate a soggy, flavourless disappointment. And not the 2010s' radical dissection of weaknesses that leaves you emotionally drained and demoralised either. Even the word 'feedback' can often make us want to brace ourselves. Many organisations treat feedback like an annual corporate colonoscopy."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Let's talk the type of nonsense that could benefit from critical feedback.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Scott Davis

Most online influencers are silly but harmless. Not so Scott Davis. The former Scottish gangster is now living in Spain and is promoting fake cures in his new role as a 'wellness influencer'.

His TikTok videos, watched by over 35,000 followers, recommend such nonsense as necklaces that can absorb toxins, herbs that cleanse the body of parasites and taking a "wee pinch" of cayenne pepper to prevent a heart attack (see www.snipca.com/54036).

He also says fasting for weeks can cure deadly diseases, and that a diet of fruit can fix diabetes.

David claims he's given up his "life of crime", but his new life of spouting dangerous anti-scientific drivel isn't much better. If I want medical advice I won't get it from someone who was fined for possessing cocaine and breaking the lockdown rules during Covid.

Credit: Scott Davis/TikTok

MINI PC | **£229** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54014

Beelink S13

Cheap as (Intel) chips

Chinese mini PC maker Beelink may not be as well known as Asus or MSI, but it offers a wide range of good-value mini PCs from budget boxes to systems built on AMD's latest Ryzen 9 AI chips. Its latest offering is very much an entry-level machine based on one of Intel's newest and cheapest processors, the quad-core N150.

> "A low-cost, no-frills PC that does the simple things well and keeps cool under pressure"

This chip is a step up from previous versions, such as the N97, which we tested in the GMKtec NucBox G5 in Issue 696 (which has dropped from £210 to £160 from www.snipca.com/52393). However, the performance leap isn't huge.

You get 16GB RAM compared with 12GB in the G5. This means it won't get bogged down if you like to run browsers with lots of tabs open. Our review unit also came with a 512GB SSD, though you can boost this to 1TB for an extra £30.

In our tests, the S13 struggled with demanding tasks like running video-editing programs or playing games such as Microsoft Flight Simulator. With office software, however, the processor was fairly comfortable and, even when we did deliberately push it for a limited period of time, the fan kicked in and kept things cool without making an intrusive noise.

Getting inside the Mini S13 is easy. Simply undo the four Philips screws in the base, take hold of the rubber tab, and lift the base out. Once inside there's easy access to both memory and SSD. There's space for a second SSD if you want to increase the storage without taking any out, but only one RAM slot which is occupied by the supplied 16GB.

We didn't expect great things from the 512GB SSD because it isn't from a recognisable brand such as Samsung and so it proved, with our benchmark tests returning read and write speeds of just 510MB/s and 480MB/s respectively. You can expect speeds three or four times as high from affordable laptops.

Given its price, you've no reason to expect the Mini S13 to be a design masterpiece made from a single piece of aluminum. Instead, what you get is a rather mundane but solid little plastic box that measures 115x110x40mm and weighs 275g. Design flourishes are limited to a diamond pattern on the top of the box and a red power button. We like the fact it has two substantial rubber feet and that it comes with the screws and bracket to mount it to a wall, or monitor, or under your desk.

On the front you'll find two USB 3.2 ports, a 3.5mm audio jack and a power button (pictured above). Around the back (pictured below left) are two more USB 3.2, two HDMI sockets and a Gigabit Ethernet port. That's better connectivity than you get on the smaller NucBox G5. However, the glaring omission is USB-C ports. It's not a deal-breaker, but it's worth considering that you'll need a hub or adapter if you want to connect any USB-C devices. Wireless connections are handled by the built-in Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.2.

SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core Intel N150 processor • 16GB RAM • Intel Graphics • 512GB SSD • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.2 • 1x Gigabit Ethernet port • 2x HDMI ports • 4x USB 3.2 ports • Windows 11 Pro • 40x115x110mm (HxWxD) • 275g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54014

VERDICT An affordable mini PC that's ideal if you mostly use office software rather than more demanding programs

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Geekom A8 £719 Our favourite mini PC is significantly more expensive, but can handle sophisticated software with ease

LAPTOP | **£1,100** from Asus www.snipca.com/54030

Asus Zenbook A14

Hard case

The Asus Zenbook A14 is made for carrying around with you. It's light, weighing only 980g, and slim at just 15.9mm thick when folded. We loved its design, which uses Asus's new Ceraluminium technology. This binds a ceramic coating into the outer layer of the aluminium chassis to produce a stronger, lighter, harder-wearing substance, which is less susceptible to scratches. It won't protect it from a drop on the floor, but it should stay looking sleek and shiny.

> "Light, sturdy and has a stunning screen, but also limitations"

To back up these travel credentials, it also comes with impressive battery life. It lasted over 19 hours in our video-playback test, which isn't unheard of in a laptop, but is impressive here because it also comes with an OLED screen. It produces a bright and vibrant picture, which normally reduces battery life, but not on this laptop. The resolution of 1920x1200 pixels isn't anything special, but it's enough for a 14in model.

Some of the extra battery power comes from the low-power requirements of the Qualcomm Snapdragon (X X1 26 100) processor. This is a new addition to Qualcomm's Snapdragon X series that's less powerful than the Snapdragon X Elite and X Plus chips we've previously seen in Windows 11 laptops.

This meant it ran slower in our performance benchmark tests than previous Copilot+ laptops we've reviewed. For example, in heavy-duty tasks it ran at around three quarters of the speed of the Dell Latitude 7455 (£1,578 from www.snipca.com/53211, reviewed in Issue 701), which uses an X Elite processor. It lags even further behind in graphics tasks, and our gaming tests were equally disappointing. In fact, we wouldn't recommend this laptop for much beyond basic Windows software.

Where it doesn't compromise is in AI performance, with this laptop having the same 45 TOPS rating that's common to all laptops that use Snapdragon processors. This ensures it can qualify as a Copilot+ laptop, and happily run the extra AI tools that Microsoft bundles into the Copilot+ version of Windows.

It's worth noting that the Zenbook A14 won't be able to run all software designed for Intel- and AMD-based laptops. Some software is available in versions that support its Snapdragon processor, others can run in an emulator that's included in the Copilot+ version of Windows, but a small number don't work at all – particularly security software and games.

Qualcomm provides a list of the most popular supported software at www.snipca.com/54033, or you can search the database at https://windowsonarm.org if you want to check specific programs.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon X (X1 26 100) processor • 16GB RAM • Qualcomm Adreno graphics • 14in 1920x1200-pixel 60Hz OLED screen • 1TB SSD • 2x USB-C 4.0 ports • 1x USB3.2 port • 1x HDMI port • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Windows 11 Home • 15.9x311x214mm (HxWxD) • 980g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54030

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *Maximum PC*, *PC Pro* and *T3*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A lightweight but sturdy 14in laptop with a superb screen and excellent battery life, but performance levels can't match rivals

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Dell Inspiron 14 Plus £799 This Intel-powered PC is cheaper and will run all your Windows software

MONITOR | **£150** from BenQ www.snipca.com/54042

BenQ GW2486TC

Adjust cause

If you're upgrading from a monitor that's smaller than 24in, or looking for a second screen to work with your laptop, the 24in BenQ GW2486TC looks like an attractive option. It doesn't offer too many advanced features, but it's designed to be comfortable for people who have to sit at a screen for extended periods, and mostly work in office software and online tools.

> "An adaptable monitor with eye-care modes for basic Windows work"

The technical details hit our expectations for the size and price. The IPS panel has a 1080p resolution of 1920x1080 pixels, with a decent 178-degree viewing angle. In our tests it had an impressive 99-per-cent coverage of the sRGB colour standard. Its 250cd/m² maximum brightness level won't be enough in a sunlit room, but it's fine for office use. Its contrast ratio is only 1300:1, which isn't ideal for watching movies or playing games, but is sufficient for general Windows use.

There's plenty to like about its physical design, though, particularly its ergonomic aspects. It offers a tall stand with a generous 130mm of height adjustment.

Once you have it at the right height, there's a 45- degree swivel left or right, a five-degree downward and 20-degree upward tilt. It can also pivot 90 degrees in either direction, if you prefer to see documents in a portrait orientation. All of this makes for a flexible, adaptable screen.

The only downside is that there's no way of keeping your cables tidy. There is a hole at the top of the stand where you could push cables through, but it's not conveniently located considering its ports point downwards.

Speaking of ports, it offers a decent selection, including two DisplayPorts (one input; one output to send a video signal to another monitor); one HDMI; one USB-C with 65W power delivery; and two USB-A ports for charging accessories. However, those latter USB ports can't be used to connect a keyboard and mouse because there's no pass-through USB to send the signals to the connected computer.

The on-screen menu is straightforward. Instead of a single joystick for control, there are a number of buttons along the bottom-right corner of the screen. Whenever you press any of these, the menu pops up as an overlay on the screen. You select an option to open sub-menus that drill down into more functions.

Where this monitor really excels is in the various modes you can choose from, particularly those minimising eye strain. Not only are there modes that limit the amount of blue light and adjust for colour blindness (ie, the inability to distinguish between colours), it can also set its own brightness levels according to the ambient light conditions.

The audio quality of the built-in speakers isn't impressive, but that's not unusual – it's fine for windows sounds and notification pings, but not listening to music. There's also a built-in microphone with adjustable noise cancellation, which you can use when making video calls if you don't have a standalone mic.

The big problem for the GW2486TC is its price. Although £150 may look like an attractive price for a 1080p 24in screen, you don't have to pay much more to get an even better model.

Our current favourite, the Philips 27E1N1600AE (£180 from www.snipca.com/51687, reviewed in Issue 692 – see page 32) is only £30 more expensive, but has a larger 27in screen, a higher resolution of 2560x1440 pixels and is a great all-rounder. While this BenQ monitor is is a strong contender, you should only choose it over the Philips model if you want a smaller screen size or need to save that extra money.

SPECIFICATIONS

24in IPS screen • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 16:9 aspect ratio • 100Hz refresh rate • 5ms response time • 2x DisplayPort (1x in, 1x out) • 1x HDMI port • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.2 ports • 501x540x185mm (HxWxD) • 6.2kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/54042

VERDICT A flexible 24in monitor with great tools for looking after your eyes, but you can get larger screens for just a little more

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Philips 27E1N1600AE £180 Has a 27in screen, higher resolution and can be easily raised and tilted

SMART SCREEN | **£299** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54151

Amazon Echo Show 15

Watch this space

Amazon has updated its smart-screen range with the new Echo Show 15. It works with Alexa, Amazon's voice-activated assistant, much like its Echo smart speakers. However, it also has a 15in touchscreen that can show useful information, stream movies and TV series, make video calls and interact with your compatible smart-home devices.

> "A handy home hub and streaming device for your kitchen"

It comes without a stand, leaving wall mounting as the only option straight out of the box. If you don't want to stick it on the wall, you can buy the official Amazon stand for £100 (www.snipca.com/54157), or choose from a selection of cheaper options from other manufacturers (such as this £44 model: www.snipca.com/54176).

The Show 15 is designed to look like a picture frame. Along the top edge are manual controls, which include a physical shutter that disables its camera, along with volume and mute buttons. Also included is the Alexa Voice Remote, which can be used to control everything when it's in TV mode.

The 15.6in screen is bright and sharp, and the 1080p resolution is perfectly fine for a screen of this size. It's certainly suitable for streaming, web browsing and reading from a distance. It has reasonable contrast and colour saturation when streaming videos, but isn't as eye-catching as a smart TV. Black levels are sufficient, given that this isn't the kind of screen you're likely to have your eyes glued to all the time.

The sound quality is decent with surprisingly pronounced bass (thanks to a pair of 2in woofers). It can also go fairly loud if you're listening to music in the kitchen, but tends to distort at very high volumes and doesn't offer the fine detail you'd get from a dedicated smart speaker.

The 13-megapixel wide-angle camera is ideal for video calls and its Drop In feature lets you make direct calls to other Show users, though you can also use Zoom. The camera has a 3.3x zoom and automatically frames you in the centre of the picture, even if you move around. It can also operate as a basic security camera via the Alexa app, which lets you see a live view from the camera at any time.

In our tests the Show 15 responded quickly to both voiced commands and screen swipes. By default it shows a customisable control centre, with handy rotating widgets, including to-do lists, weather, calendars and news headlines. If you have any smart plugs, thermostats or light bulbs, you can also control these from here.

SPECIFICATIONS
15.6in screen • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 13-megapixel camera • 2x 2in woofer and 2x 0.6in tweeter speakers • Wi-Fi 6E • Compatible with Matter, Wi-Fi, Thread and Zigbee smart home devices • 260x410x40mm (HxWxD) • 2.2kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54151

VERDICT A surprisingly good Alexa smart assistant, home-organisation hub and Amazon Fire TV streaming screen in one device

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Nest Hub Max £219
Google's largest alternative has a smaller 10in screen, but it's cheaper and you won't need to buy a separate stand

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Nvidia's GeForce RTX 50 series graphics cards

What are they?
Nvidia's new 5090, 5080 and 5070 graphics cards. These are more powerful than Nvidia's previous generation, making graphically demanding software run faster, more smoothly and with greater detail.

How do they work?
Graphics cards have their own processors, memory and cooling systems. Software will pass the demanding job of creating 3D worlds or rendering video, for example, on to the graphics card, leaving the main processor free to manage everything else.

What are the specs?
The top-of-the-range RTX 5090 (pictured below) promises to double the performance levels of the previous generation RTX 4090 card and costs £1,939. Further down the price scale, the RTX 5070 matches the performance of the 4090 and costs £539. If you're prepared to wait a little longer, RTX 5060 and 5050 chips are expected soon and will be cheaper still, albeit less powerful.

Can I change them later?
Yes and no. With a desktop PC you can remove and replace any installed card. However, graphics cards in laptops tend to be non-replaceable.

DIGITAL MUSIC PLAYER | **£179** from Peter Tyson www.snipca.com/54124

FiiO JM21

On the right tracks

Computer active BUY IT! ★★★★★

While smartphones make a reasonably good job of providing music on the move via streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music, serious music fans may want more. The FiiO JM21 is a portable digital player that plays albums and tracks from your own collection of ripped and downloaded music files, which will almost certainly be higher quality than tracks you download from streaming services (though you can also play those services via downloaded apps).

> "Impeccable design, outstanding audio and ample storage"

The player is an impeccably built combination of plastic and aluminium. It has a relatively large 4.7in touchscreen, with a sharp 750x1334-pixel resolution and decent brightness levels to assist use outdoors. There's plenty of room for track information, even though the device itself is smaller than most smartphones and weighs just 156g. Slip it in a pocket and you'll barely notice that it's there.

It runs an adapted version of Android 13 which was smooth and stable in our tests. It has 3GB of RAM and just 22GB of storage, which will soon fill up, but there's a microSD card slot that can add up to 2TB if needed. In other words, you'll have plenty of room for a large, high-resolution music collection, which you can listen to through wired headphones (via the 3.5mm and 4.4mm audio jacks) or wirelessly through Bluetooth 5.0.

We tested the JM21 with high-end earbuds from Bowers & Wilkins and Sennheiser, while listening to an eclectic range of music – and the JM21 never put a foot wrong. It hit hard with deep and textured bass frequencies, there was plenty of bite in the higher notes, and it remained expressive throughout in the mid-range. That adds up to superb quality sound across the board.

There are also physical controls on the edge of the player. On the left side (as you look at it) there's a power button with an LED indicator just below it. Beneath that is a volume switch. On the right, there are play/pause, skip forwards and skip backwards controls.

Considering its relatively low price tag, this is an outstanding player that matches devices that are almost twice the price.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 680 processor • 3GB RAM • 22GB storage • 4.7in 750x1334-pixel touchscreen • Cirrus Logic CS43198 DAC • MicroSD card slot (supports cards up to 2TB) • Bluetooth 5.0 • Android 13 • 121x68x13mm (HxWxD) • 156g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54124

VERDICT A stylish, reasonably priced dedicated music player that provides great-sounding music

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Majority Bluetooth MP3 Music Player £27

Significantly cheaper, but it doesn't come close to the build or audio quality of the JM21

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Is a mini PC the right device for us?

Q I'd like to replace my old Lenovo ThinkPad laptop because it can't be upgraded to Windows 11. It has 8GB of RAM, an Intel Core i5-7300U processor and 500GB of storage. I primarily use it for office tasks, web browsing and light gaming. My wife also uses it for illustration work and the kids for homework. I want a PC that balances performance, price and longevity. I'm happy to pay up to £1,000. We live in a relatively small house, so space is at a premium. While a laptop offers portability, we never take it anywhere. A mini PC seems like a practical option, but which one would you suggest?

Steve Willey

A We'd recommend the Geekom A8, which is currently our favourite mini PC. (£899 from www.snipca.com/51157, see page 32, pictured). It's powered by an AMD Ryzen 9 8945HS processor, which is over a year old, so isn't exactly cutting edge, but is one of the best on offer for the price you're prepared to pay. With 32GB of RAM and a 2TB SSD, there's plenty of memory and storage for all your family's needs. It comes with a VESA mount, so you could attach it to the back of your monitor, which would make it really easy to get out and put away as and when it's needed.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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LAPTOP CHARGER | **£70** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54067

Anker Laptop Power Bank

Take charge

The Anker Laptop Power Bank is a portable battery you can plug into a laptop when you're on the go. It's a big step up from the typical smartphone chargers you might be familiar with, because it can output 165W and has a large 25,000mAh capacity.

While this is a hefty piece of kit, weighing 594g, it's remarkably slender for such a heavy-duty battery. Still, you'll want to carry it around in your bag rather than a trouser pocket.

It has a USB-C and USB-A port, both located on one long side. It also has two integrated cables – one loops round into a clip, doubling as a carrying handle (pictured right); while the other is retractable, with one end connecting magnetically to the base to help keep it tucked away. This keeps cable clutter to a minimum, as well as saving you the trouble of carrying additional cables.

The charging performance is good. All three USB-C outputs can deliver up to 100W, and Anker claims an M3 MacBook Pro or iPhone 16 can charge to 50 per cent in around 30 minutes. While charging, the screen also usefully monitors the output wattage in real time.

We managed to charge a Lenovo IdeaPad 4G laptop in about two hours, which is pretty impressive. Better still, the Power Bank level only dropped to about 50 per cent, which means you should be able to get two full charges out of it. Recharging it from empty to full took just 90 minutes.

SPECIFICATIONS

25000mAh capacity • 165W • 2x USB-C cables • 1x USB-C port • 1x regular USB port • 157x54x49mm (HxWxD) • 594g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54067

VERDICT A powerful power bank that that charges phones to 50 per cent in 30 minutes and laptops in full in two hours

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Anker 621 Magnetic Battery £40 A less powerful device that's designed to recharge smartphones and tablets

HEADPHONES | **£80** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54070

Panasonic RB-M600

Carries a tune

Panasonic's RB-M600 wireless headphones sit over the top of your ears and have one outstanding feature – they can last for around 40 hours between charges with noise-cancelling switched on. That's better than many headphones that are significantly more expensive. The noise-cancellation is very effective, too, helped by the snug padding.

Switching off noise-cancelling boosts battery life to 65 hours. That's great if you're wearing them in quieter spaces, such as around the home.

It doesn't come with an app, so there are no settings to tweak, but we were happy with the sound quality.

Pairing the RB-M600 to Bluetooth on our smartphone was quick and easy and the connection remained reliable throughout our tests. If you'd prefer to use the headphones wired on occasion, there's a 3.5mm audio jack next to the USB-C charging port on the right.

Audio quality is balanced with a decent amount of bass and separation of sounds, but we preferred the audio of the Sony WH-CH720N headphones (£100 from www.snipca.com/46782, reviewed in Issue 663), though they have around half the battery life.

The headphone speakers provide a good sound at reasonable volume. Treble and bass are well separated, though we found that mid-tones tended to blend together. Our biggest gripe is that the bass loses some of its depth when the volume is turned up.

There is an XBS Deep button, designed to enhance bass, but we found it inconsistent.

SPECIFICATIONS

30mm speaker drivers • 65-hour battery life • Active noise cancellation • 265g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54070

VERDICT Affordable headphones offering decent audio quality, are comfortable to wear and keep going

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Sony WH-CH720N £100 Half the battery life, but superior noise cancelling

SMARTWATCH | **£100** from Amazfit www.snipca.com/54088

Amazfit Active 2

Fails the fitness test

The Active 2 smartwatch from Chinese manufacturer Amazfit is packed with features at a very reasonable price. Its display is a fabulous 1.32in AMOLED touchscreen, with an impressive 2,000cd/m² peak brightness level. That's more than bright enough to see in direct sunlight, and it's vibrant, sharp and responsive to touch. There's also an always-on display mode, which keeps the screen alive at all times, so you don't have to wake the watch by lifting your wrist to glance at the time. This is a feature that many budget watches skip. The stainless steel casing is lightweight at just 53g, while the silicon strap is unremarkable, but does the job.

> "Fine during rest periods, but struggled to keep up with high-intensity exercise"

Designed for fitness enthusiasts who want a capable device without a hefty price tag, it can track 160 activities including running, cycling and swimming. These core activities are reliably tracked, with the built-in GPS providing a decent level of accuracy. Other tracked activities include strength training, padel, yoga, skiing and even dog walking.

On the health-tracking side, the Active 2 covers most of the basics, including heart-rate monitoring, sleep tracking, stress measurement and blood-oxygen saturation.

In tests we found the results slightly inconsistent compared with more popular brands, such as Fitbit and Garmin. Heart-rate tracking was reliable when our heart rate was stable for long periods, but it struggled to keep up with rapid fluctuations, such as during interval workouts, where you repeat high-intensity exercises for short periods between brief cool-downs.

However, we were impressed that we could download maps to use offline, and by its turn-by-turn navigation, which is rare in devices at this price. That said, maps were sometimes slow to load, and weren't always accurate in towns and cities.

Amazfit's Zepp app, which stores all your smartwatch data, isn't the easiest smartwatch app we've tested. You can customise its home screen and it provides quick access to key stats, but its navigation screen can become cluttered. But the biggest annoyance is the constant nudges to subscribe to premium features.

Amazfit claims you can get 10 days from a single battery charge, although we found it was nearer to six if you use the GPS to monitor a one-hour workout each day, and use the watch to interact with phone notifications.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.32in AMOLED touchscreen • 5ATM water resistence • Bluetooth 5.2 • Up to 10-day battery life • 44x44x9.9mm (HxDxW) • 53g • One-year warranty

www.snipca.com/54088

VERDICT Plenty of features but it can't keep up with intense exercise, and the app isn't easy to use

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Fitbit Charge 6 £140 Our favourite fitness band – more expensive but offers incredibly accurate health and exercise tracking

DO I REALLY NEED...

A laptop with a foldable screen?

What is it?

Lenovo's latest idea for a laptop, which has a foldable OLED screen.

What does it do?

Unfolded, the screen has a tall aspect ratio, measuring 18.1in across the diagonal. Alternatively, the top half of the screen can be folded backwards so it faces away from the keyboard (pictured). This gives you a second screen that can be useful for sharing presentations.

What's the catch?

It's only a concept at the moment, which means that Lenovo has produced a prototype to show potential customers. We don't know how much it will cost or whether it will even get made.

So can I do without it?

Yes. For most people one standard landscape-orientated screen is enough.

NEXT ISSUE

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A mini PC with a powerful processor and plenty of scope for upgrades

iPad Air
Apple's new iPad Air offers a lot more power for the same price

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Buy It

Find out which other products we liked. Buy our 2024 **Back Issue CD**: £19 from **www.snipca.com/53433**

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£799 from www.snipca.com/51831
Tested Issue 683

This laptop has the same processor (Intel Core Ultra 7 155H) as our previous favourite (Acer Swift Go 4), but manages to squeeze more speed out of it. It also comes with 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Excellent value overall.

ALTERNATIVE Acer Swift Go 14 Still a fast and powerful laptop, with a great 14in screen. £699 from www.snipca.com/49733

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £656 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 10.9in
£329 from www.snipca.com/53977
Tested Issue 646

The price of the 10th-generation iPad, released in 2022, has fallen far enough that it's the best-value model. The link above takes you to Apple, but also check John Lewis where it's been as low as £309.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

Honor MagicPad2
£499 from www.snipca.com/53150
Tested Issue 700

With a larger screen (12.3in) than the Galaxy Tab S9 (below) and a similar performance for less money, Honor's MagicPad2 is a superb new tablet. The OLED screen has a strikingly sharp resolution, and yet battery life is a mighty 18 hours.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £799 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £549 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 7a
£299 from www.snipca.com/53388
Tested Issue 660

A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE Nothing Phone 2a Don't be put off by the odd name. This has a distinctive design, superb camera and decent battery life. From a UK company too. £279 from www.snipca.com/49930

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David Birch, Chichester

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Mr and Mrs Davies Somerset

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Carol Doyle, Surrey

REDUCES ENERGY BILLS

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Anne Bird, Bristol

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Mr & Mrs Bailey-Webb, Warsash

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Mr & Mrs Barber, Wells

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

Geekom A8
£899 from www.snipca.com/51157
Tested Issue 689

This tiny machine (37x112x112mm) doesn't have much room for ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD, a fast processor and an SD card slot for adding storage. It comes with 32GB RAM, as does a slightly slower model that's typically around £170 cheaper and has only a 1TB SSD. Take your pick.

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox M7 Pro Has an older processor, but comes with plenty of ports and room to add a graphics card. £560 from www.snipca.com/52858

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Premium
£19.99 from www.snipca.com/33247
Tested Issue 629

Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm NortonLifeLock, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a 10-device, two-year licence. Other versions are available, including Norton 360 for Gamers.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £19.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£65 from www.snipca.com/50751
Tested Issue 608

Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £38 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£187 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£79 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £79; 2TB costs £135.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £58 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 3...

Majority Bard 2.1 Internet Radio Music Systems

Majority's Bard 2.1 Internet Radio Music System lets you enjoy a wide range of audio channels, from DAB and FM radio, Bluetooth, internet radio and Spotify Connect. It also gives you access to thousands of podcasts around the world with the dedicated Podcast feature.

Listen to your favourite stations while you wake up or fall asleep with the dual alarm and timer. It has more than 90 presets to let you quickly access your favourite stations with the press of a button on the device or remote control.

It has two 4in speakers, and is backed up by a huge 5in powerful subwoofer. Its 100-watt system packs a real punch, delivering a deeper bass with clean and crisp audio. Majority's enhanced digital radio sound quality is designed and perfected by its group of audio experts.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/53965 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 8 April. Good luck!

You can buy Majority's Bard 2.1 Internet Radio Music System for £126.99 from www.snipca.com/53966. For more Majority products, including DVD players, microphones, speakers and turntables, visit www.majority.co.uk.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830

£250 from www.snipca.com/51715
Tested Issue 676

This has recently risen in price from £180, but it's still better value than the ET-1810 because it adds copying and scanning to its functions for £110 more. Print quality is great, especially for photos, which have crisp details, vivid colours and realistic skin tones.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £140 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB

£199 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung CU8000
More expensive, but has a 55in LED screen and sharp 4K resolution. Connectivity is good, with three HDMI and two USB ports. £419 from www.snipca.com/52110

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800

£210 from www.snipca.com/52957
Tested Issue 665

This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £210 from www.snipca.com/52051

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HOW TO...

Access files stored on old floppy disks

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: External floppy drive **Time required:** 30 minutes

When Apple released the first iMac in August 1998, it wasn't only the unusual translucent case design that got the world talking. Many traditional PC users were astounded that the machine on which Apple was building its future lacked one of the most fundamental pieces of hardware in a modern machine: a 3.5in floppy drive.

Optical drives were mainstream by then, but they hadn't yet unseated floppy disks as the primary means of storing and sharing data. So, how were we meant to back up our files without a floppy drive? How were we going to share them with one another? Come to that – how on earth were we going to install software?

The answer, it turned out, was all tied up in the 'i' in the iMac's name: internet. While the iMac might have lacked a floppy drive at the front, it had a modem and networking components around the back. It's impossible to overstate how radical this was. Back then, such features were almost always optional extras – usually expensive, and frequently confusing and time-consuming to set up.

If Apple hadn't taken these risks, we probably wouldn't have iPods, iPhones and iPads. And if Apple hadn't used iMac to launch the iPod, and the iPod to launch the iPhone, we might still be using push-button 'dumb' phones rather than pinching and swiping, listening to podcasts on the move, emailing on the commute, and avoiding traffic jams courtesy of CarPlay and Android Auto.

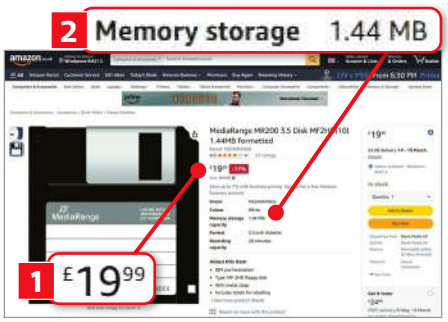
The iMac was a watershed that ushered in all kinds of new technologies and a better way of using computers – and in doing so it freed us of some old, outdated features, like serial and parallel ports (which were replaced by USB), and the much beloved floppy drive.

However, if you happen to have some old floppy disks lying around and would like to extract files from them, here we explain how.

1 Buy new floppy disks

Within five years of the iMac's launch, floppy drives were becoming increasingly rare in new PCs, and floppy-disk manufacturers were seeing sales shrink dramatically. Big manufacturers like Dell stopped including floppy drives in many PCs from 2003 and Sony, credited with producing the first 3.5in disks way back in 1981, stopped selling them in 2011.

Despite this, you can still buy new disks today – but they're much more expensive than they were at the height of their popularity, and on a pound-per-byte basis, they're poor value for money.



This pack costs £20 for 10 1.44MB floppy disks, which works out at £1,777 per gigabyte

You can pick up a 256GB SanDisk USB flash drive for £17 (www.snipca.com/54153), which works out at about 7p per gigabyte. Or, you could buy a box of floppy disks. Amazon's Choice in this department comes from MediaRange and will cost you £19.99 for 10 disks (www.snipca.com/54154, (1 in our screenshot left),

which isn't a bad price when you compare it to what you could be paying elsewhere.

Each disk has a capacity of 1.44MB 2, so that's 14.4MB for the entire box, which is just about enough to store two high-quality MP3s downloaded from an online music store. Per gigabyte, that works out at £1,777.92!

You won't be surprised to hear, therefore, that we don't recommend you switch from SSD, hard drive or USB sticks to floppy disks for regular data storage. However, if you still have a handful of old floppies lying around, as we do, you might want to add a floppy drive to your computer so you can extract their contents. Fortunately, this isn't particularly tricky, and neither is it very expensive. You can pick up a drive for roughly the price of a box of disks.

2 Buy a USB floppy drive

When browsing which floppy drive to buy, we wanted to make sure it would work with up-to-date versions of Windows. It initially seemed this was going to be trickier than we expected, as many list compatibility with Windows 95, 98, Me, XP, and Vista, some say they work with Windows 7, but not all list versions of Windows all the way through to Windows 11.

In the end, we came upon a portable drive from German firm CSL, which cost £25 from www.snipca.com/54155. The listing mentioned both Windows 10 and 11 (1 in our screenshot below), with a rating of 4.1 out of 5 2 based on 552 reviews. It was also available on next-day delivery 3 - and indeed it arrived promptly.

3 Plug the drive into your PC

It was easy to insert the floppy disk into the drive (pictured above right). It doesn't need a disk driver – as soon as we plugged it into a USB port, our PC recognised it. We opened File Explorer in Windows then clicked This PC in the left-hand sidebar (1 in our screenshot below right). We then found a new entry for 'Floppy Disk Drive (A:)' in the main pane 2, alongside our existing SSD (C:) 3, and our pCloud drive (P:) 4. Double-clicking the A: drive popped up a familiar box that we've not seen in several years, asking us to insert a disc 5.

Going back to floppy disks was quite an eye opener. For one thing, the drive has a physical eject button, which feels lovely when you press it (there's a little wait before the disk pops out), but is so unfamiliar when you're used to plugging in and unplugging storage. For another, inserting a new disk doesn't immediately update what you see in File Explorer.

When we ejected our first disk and inserted a new one, Windows made no effort to read it, perhaps because as far as it was concerned nothing had changed. After all, the USB cable hadn't been disconnected, and the eject function was entirely physical rather than being controlled by the operating system.

As a result, it still showed the contents of the original disk in the File Explorer window. When we double-clicked an icon still showing in the File Explorer window, the fact that it didn't appear on the new disk threw up an error message (see screenshot above).

The solution is to press Ctrl+R when you insert a new disk if the File Explorer

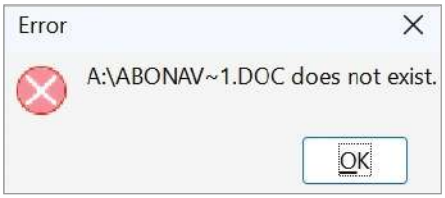
How I look after floppy disks

I have to admit that the floppy disks used in this How To have been sitting loose in a plastic box for months following an office move. Before that, they were scattered about on a shelf without any protection, and I've never thought to shield them from any electromagnetic interference, so it's fortunate that they can be read at all. Now that I've backed them up, I will be hanging on to them, but it's unlikely they'll ever be read or written to again.

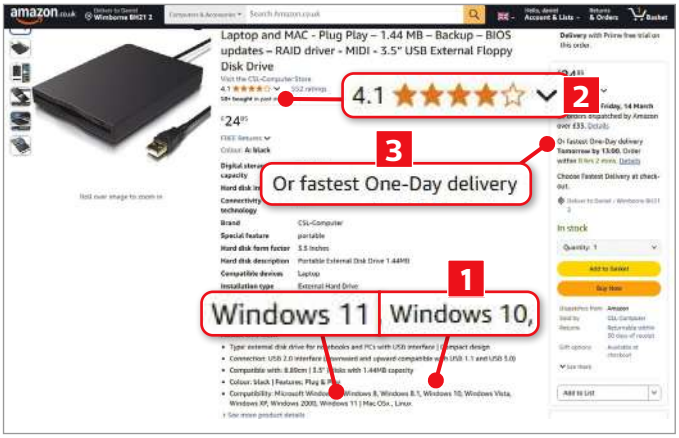
Nik Rawlinson

How do you manage your floppy disks?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

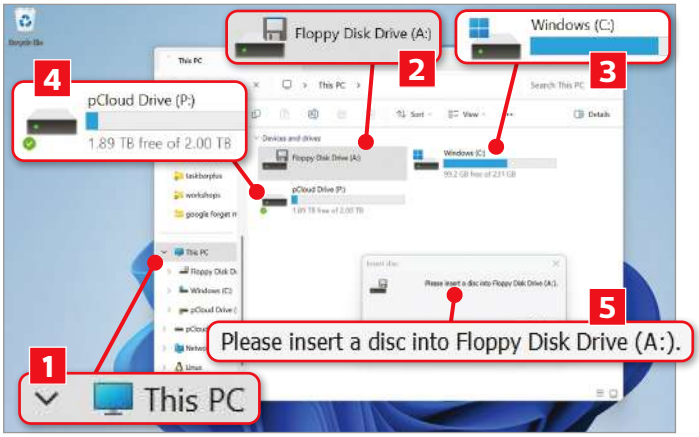
We inserted the floppy disk into a CSL drive



Refresh your File Explorer window to avoid this error message


Laptop and MAC - Plug Play – 1.44 MB – Backup – BIOS updates – RAID driver - MIDI - 3.5" USB External Floppy Disk Drive
4.1
2
3
Or fastest One-Day delivery
1
Windows 11
Windows 10,

CSL's floppy drive on Amazon works with both Windows 10 and 11



We clicked This PC and the Floppy Disk Drive appeared as drive A:

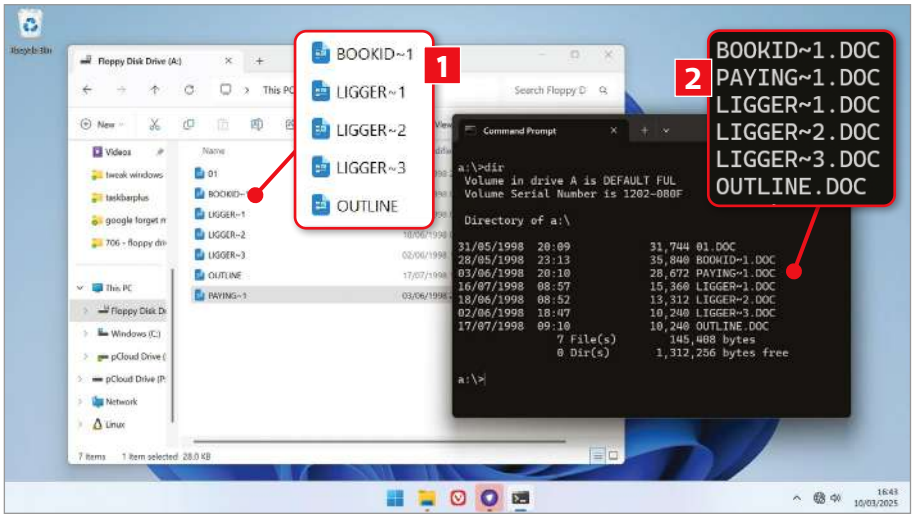
window is still open. With 'R' standing for 'Refresh', this forces Windows to read the contents of the disk again and draw up a new file list, so you can immediately access its contents.

The other thing you might notice, as we did, is that your file names aren't immediately recognisable. In our case, some file names had been truncated, with a '~1', '~2', '~3' at the end (1 in our screenshot right) suggesting they had previously been much longer.

This is likely to do with the way the file system has changed over time. Computers previously used what is known as the 8.3 file-naming convention, where the main part of a file name could have a maximum of eight characters and the extension could have a maximum of three (which is why you still see things like .doc at the end of a Word file and .odt at the end of a LibreOffice Writer document).

To see whether we could rediscover the original file names, we opened Command Prompt in Windows and typed a to switch to the floppy drive, then dir and again pressed Enter. The dir command is short for 'directory', and you can use it on any drive – not just a floppy drive – to list the disk's contents.

The list this produced 2 was identical to the one in File Explorer, so it's unlikely we'll ever be able to reproduce our original file names. Fortunately, this doesn't stop us accessing the contents.



We used Command Prompt to check the original file names on our floppy disk

4 Identify old files on your disks

Each of the disks we used had last been accessed in 1998, so the files themselves had been gathering digital dust for more than a quarter of a century already. Despite that, all our disks were still readable, and only one of them contained a file we weren't able to load. In one other case, we turned up what seemed to be part of an archive, as one disk contained a single file with the extension .014.

This matched the number '14' that we'd written in pencil on the label, which suggests to us that this was part of a backup set spread across multiple disks (this was common years ago, as it was often impossible to fit a backup on a single disk). As we don't have other numbered disks to accompany it, this backup is likely lost forever.

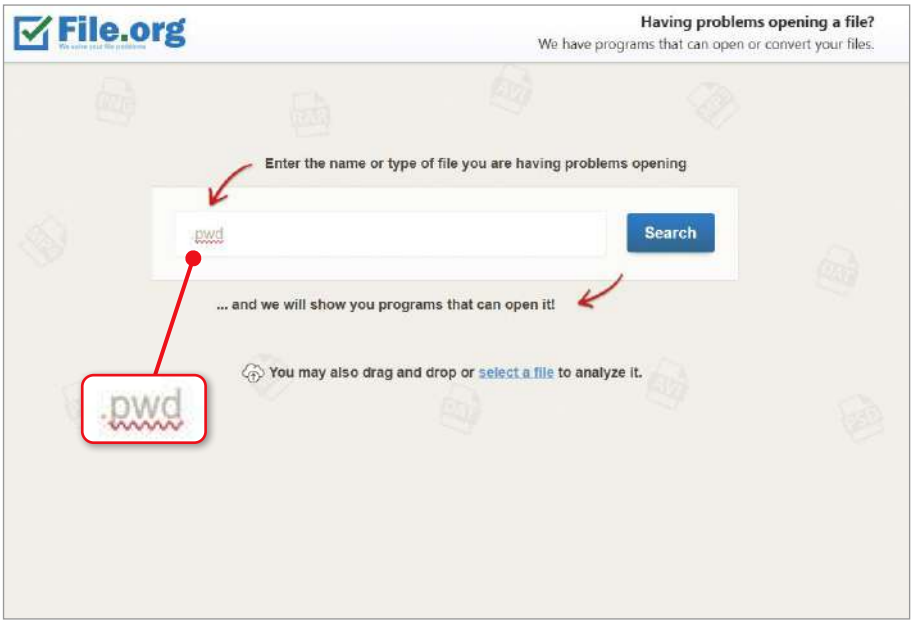
In other cases, the files we encountered remained compatible with modern software, and we were able to open all our Word 97 files in the most recent version of LibreOffice Writer (25.2).

That might not be the case with every file, though. For example, we've come across old Pocket Word files from a handheld Windows CE computer on an old SD card. You might imagine we could open these quite easily, but we first had to convert them using an online service (https://docsconverter.net).

If you can't identify the file you're working with, start by searching for the extension at a site like www.file.org (see screenshot below left), but do be aware that some file extensions are used by multiple programs. For example, '.pwd' is used by both Pocket Word and the defunct password manager Password Commander Pro.

We don't know how much longer our floppy disks are going to be readable and, as we don't have backups of their contents, we're not going to use them directly with our new floppy-disk drive. Instead, we're going to spend an afternoon copying their contents on to our hard drive. We'll then back them up from there so we have three copies of the data – the original on the floppy disks, the working copy on the hard drive, and the backup copy that we will be storing online.

And, while we won't have any use for the floppy drive once we've completed that job, we'll be hanging on to it for the time being. As floppy disks become rarer, external floppy-disk drives might come in useful, like VHS and Betamax video players, for rescuing old family movies so the footage can be burned to DVD.


File.org
Having problems opening a file?
We have programs that can open or convert your files.
Enter the name or type of file you are having problems opening
pwd
Search
... and we will show you programs that can open it!
You may also drag and drop or select a file to analyze it.
.pwd

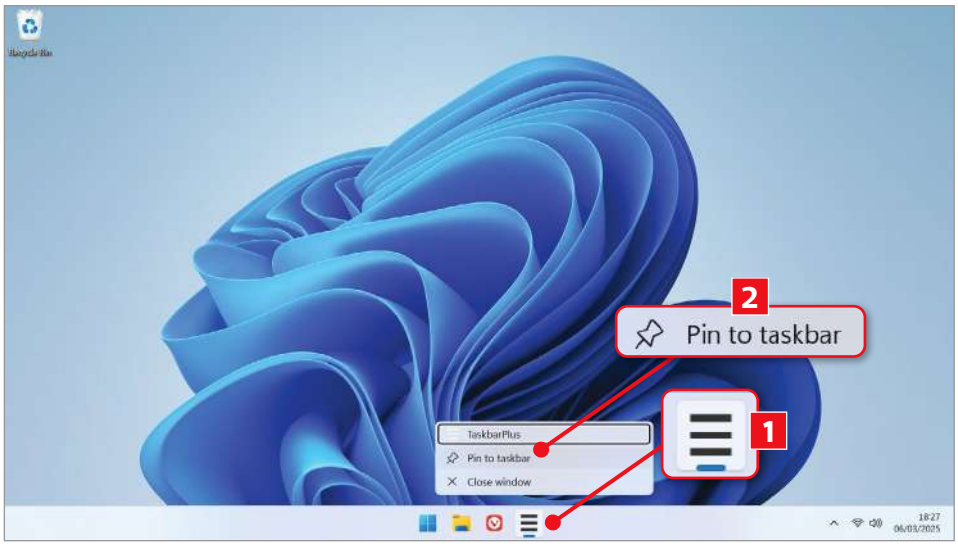
If you can't identify a file, search for its extension at File.org

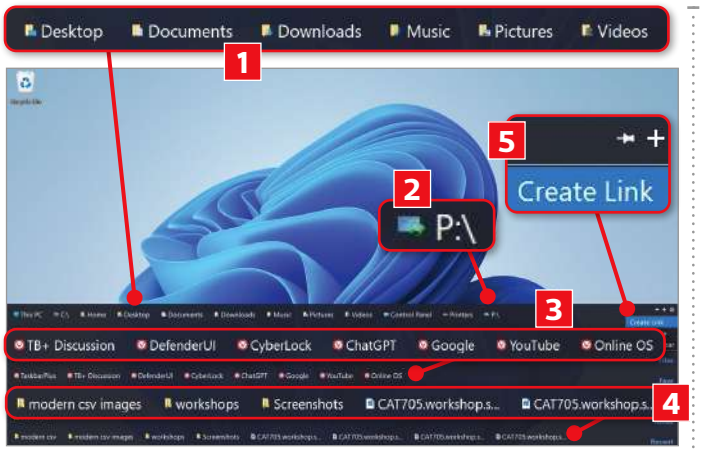
Navigate your PC more quickly using TaskbarPlus

What you need: TaskbarPlus
Time required: 30 minutes

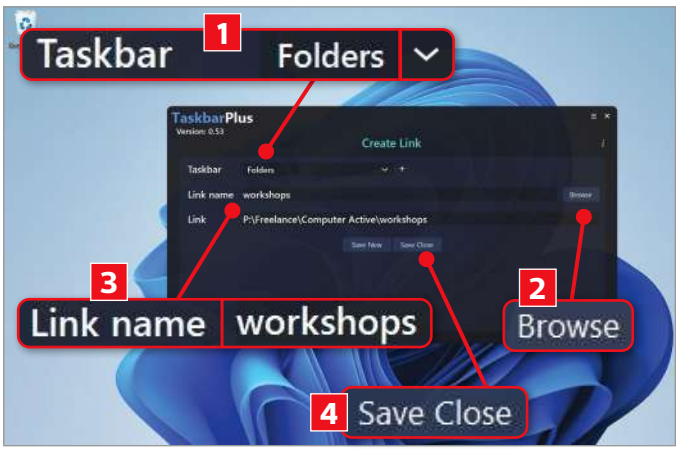
Combined, the Start menu and taskbar make it easy to find your most commonly used files, folders and software, but their contents will change to reflect your recent use. If you'd like to keep the files and locations you really need within easy reach, try using TaskbarPlus. Launched in January, this free program lets you set up the shortcuts you want, organise them into clusters of taskbars, and even write 'sticky' notes to yourself that you can refer to later. Here, we explain how to use it.

STEP 1 Go to www.taskbarplus.com, click the blue Download Now button and follow the onscreen instructions to install it. First, make sure TaskbarPlus is always as easy to access as the default option. So, after opening it, right-click its icon 1 in the taskbar and click 'Pin to taskbar' 2. You can (optionally) click, hold and drag it to a new position on the taskbar, such as immediately to the right of the Windows icon. Note, it's not possible to drag it to the left of the Start menu icon.

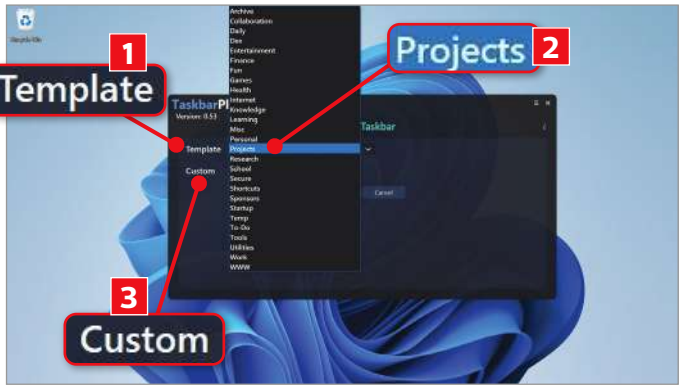




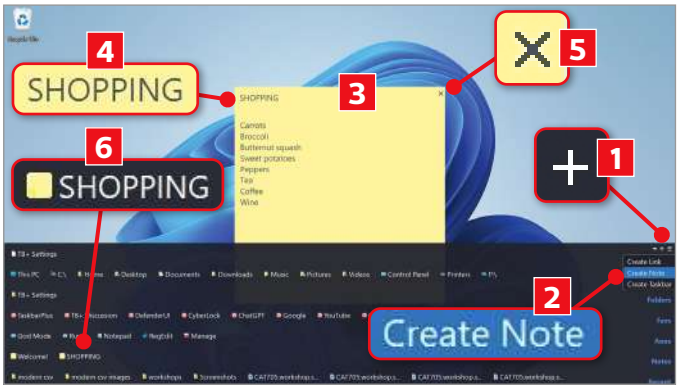
STEP 2 Once you're happy with the icon's position, click it to reveal the default TaskbarPlus layout. This consists of seven rows (or taskbars) of icons and shortcuts, which will already be tailored based on your previous usage. They include links to Windows' directories 1 and any external drives you're connected to 2. You'll also find links to your browser favourites 3 and documents you've recently been working on 4. To add a new entry, click the '+' icon followed by Create Link 5.



STEP 3 Next, click the menu beside Taskbar 1 and select which 'taskbar' your link will appear in. In our screenshot, we're leaving this as Folders to put it on the second taskbar down. Now click Browse 2 and navigate to the folder you want to add to the taskbar and click Open. TaskbarPlus will automatically fill in the Link name 3 but you can change this by double clicking it. When you've finished, click Save Close 4.

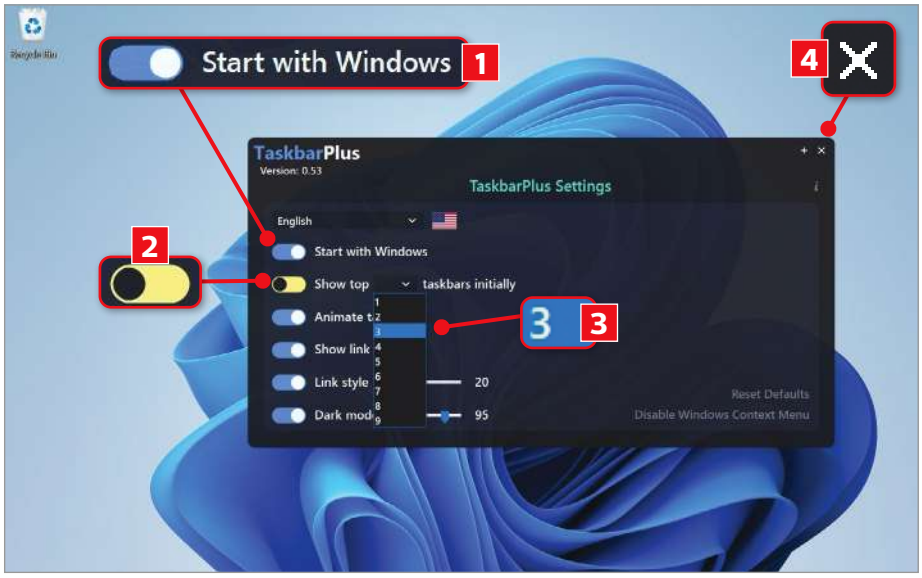


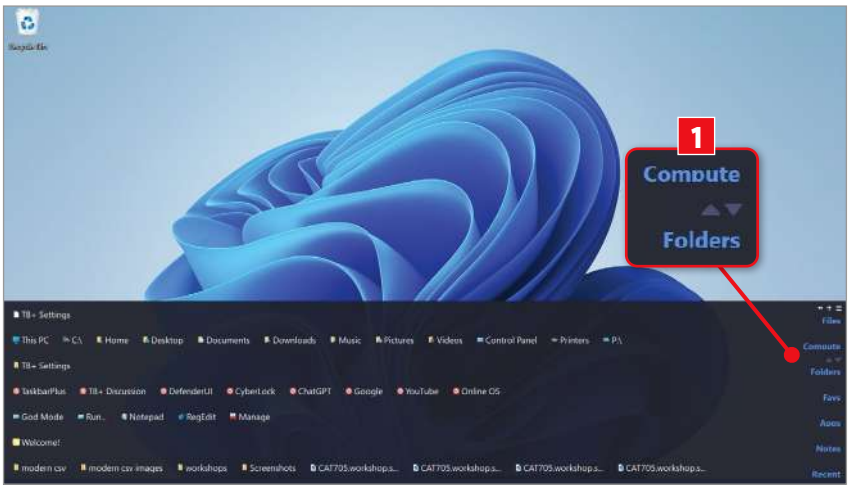
STEP 4 To delete a link to a file or folder simply right-click it on the taskbar and click Delete Link. If none of your existing taskbars is a good fit for a new link, you can create a new taskbar by clicking the same '+' button you did in Step 3 followed by New Taskbar. Click the Template menu 1 and select an option 2 to name the new template. The Custom field 3 will disappear, to be replaced by the Create Link box you saw in the Step 3, which you can use in the same way to insert the new taskbar's first link.



STEP 5 One of the most useful features in TaskbarPlus is its note-taking system. Click the '+' button 1 followed by Create Note 2 and a yellow notepad will open 3. Type your note, then double-click the Note 1 at the top of the page and give it a name 4. When you close the note 5 it will be saved, and will appear on the taskbar 6 so you can quickly return to it when you need to.

STEP 6 When you've finished configuring your taskbars, make sure TaskbarPlus is set to start with Windows. Click its icon to open it, then click the three bars beside the '+' button (see Steps 3 to 5) to open its settings. Check that 'Start with Windows' is switched on 1. Optionally, if your taskbars are taking up too much space, turn off the second slider 2, then select how many taskbars you want to show in the dropdown menu 3. Close the window 4 to save the setting.





STEP 7 If you've made a change to the number of visible taskbars, you need to make sure that the ones you use most appear at the top of the list (or they'll be hidden by default). Do this by hovering your cursor over the name of a taskbar you want to move, then click the up or down-pointing arrows that appear 1 to move the taskbar to the relevant position. While here, you can also delete any taskbar you no longer want by right-clicking it and clicking Delete Taskbar.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

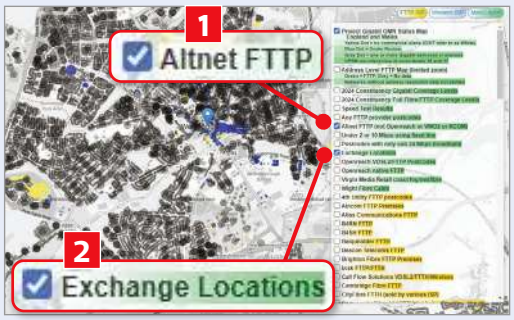
See map of alternative broadband providers nearby

That broadband map from Thinkbroadband that you wrote about in Issue 704 (page 7) is extremely comprehensive. I've spent a lot of time exploring the areas near me in Northamptonshire comparing speeds and coverage.

There are some useful options on the right that change what the map shows. Tick the 'Speed Test Results' box and you'll see some broadband speeds pop up on the map. Click these to see which provider it is. You can also tick the 'Postcodes with only sub 24 Mbps broadband' to know which areas to avoid!

But for me the two most useful options are Altnet FTTP (1 in our screenshot) and Exchange Locations 2. Altnets are small, local providers, not those using BT and Virgin networks. In my experience these give you more reliable speeds and better customer support.

On the map they appear as grey circles, while the exchanges appear as blue. Zoom into the latter and you'll see when Openreach switched them off.



Stephen Painter

Stephen wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD **Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433**

AI

Check ChatGPT has updated its memory

I've been experimenting with ChatGPT since reading Issue 702's Cover Feature, and love how it seems to understand what you want the more you use it. You mentioned that you can make it remember your preferences by asking it to do so. I often do this (1 in our screenshot below), but I also check that it shows 'Memory updated' in its answer 2 as confirmation.

Sally Hutchings

WINDOWS

Add Countdown and Timer widgets

I agree with your assessment that widgets are surprisingly good in Windows 11 (see Workshop, Issue 704). I also agree that news, traffic and weather widgets are the most important, but I've added the Countdown and Timer widgets too. These are Windows apps that are handy for letting you know when a deadline is approaching.

Click the plus sign (+) to the right of the Widgets heading (1 in our screenshot above right) then choose Countdown or Timer. The latter sounds an alarm at the end, and is better for short deadlines. I use Countdown 2 more. It helps to remind me when a free software trial is ending, so I can cancel and not end up paying. Click the blue plus sign 3 to add a specific countdown.

Widgets
1
Countdown
2
3
Warning to 3.2m Chrome users over malicious extensions to 'delete now'
Morrisons
UK weather: Temperatures plummet towards FREEZING but balmy Britain hotter th...
Morrisons launches new breakfast deal for over 60s in its cafés - and it's just £5

Tom Lancaster

Why I stopped using...

My Windows 10 laptop

My old laptop is slow and free support for Windows 10 is ending soon, so I thought I'd have to buy an expensive replacement.

And what I use instead

But then I started thinking about what I actually use it for and realised that my **Lenovo Tab P11 Pro tablet** (£420 from www.snipca.com/53938, pictured) does what I need. It starts in no time, has a good 11in OLED screen and doesn't need constant Windows updates. It's also light and has a good battery life.

My laptop does have all my photos on it which are backed up to a 1TB external SSD. It was relatively inexpensive to add a 1TB SD card to my tablet so I can back up my photos to my external SSD using FolderSync (https://foldersync.io).

I edit photos on the tablet using Adobe Lightroom Mobile (www.snipca.com/53949). I could add a Bluetooth keyboard, but I'm only a one-finger typist. There's an option to add a SIM card, but I don't need it at the moment. So for the time being I'll use my tablet for everything.

Keith Burr

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

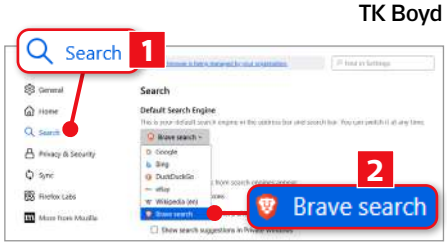
BROWSERS

Make Brave your default search engine in Firefox

In Issue 702's Readers' Tips Martin Wilkins said he switched from Firefox to Brave's browser. An alternative is to keep using Firefox but make Brave its default search engine. Do this by clicking the menu button (three horizontal lines) at the top right then selecting Settings followed by Search (1 in our screenshot below). Now use the dropdown menu under Default Search Engine to choose your preferred search engine.

If you don't see Brave listed, scroll to the bottom and click 'Find more search engines'. Now type Brave Search into the bar at the top right, press Enter, then click 'Add to Firefox'. Relaunch Firefox, then check the Default Search Engine menu again and Brave should be there 2.

TK Boyd

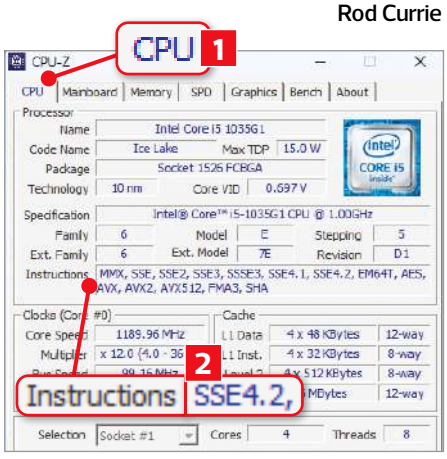


WINDOWS

Check whether your PC supports SSE4.2

I've successfully used your advice to upgrade to Windows 11 on an unsupported 2011 Intel-based laptop. However, it's been reported that from build 26080 of Windows 11 24H2 one technical specification you can't override is support for the SSE4.2 instruction set. Windows 11 will fail to boot on computers that lack these. To check whether your computer has SSE4.2, use CPUID's tool CPU-Z (www.cpuid.com). Click the CPU tab (1 in our screenshot below) and look in the 'Instructions' box 2.

Rod Currie



Reader recommends...

Foktech dual-band Wi-Fi adapter

£13 from www.snipca.com/5396

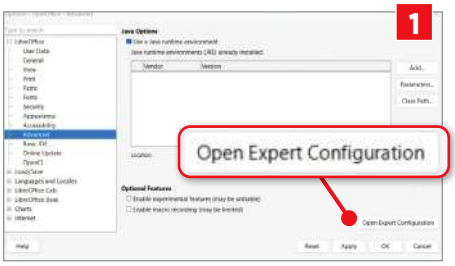
My 10-year-old Dell laptop is still working fine, but my broadband speed was only occasionally reaching the 50Mbps I'm paying for. I then checked my recently installed router to see if I could improve the speed, without success.

But then I remembered that a couple of years ago I bought a Foktech dual-band Wi-Fi adapter, for an old desktop PC. I decided to give it a try on my laptop, after first disabling the original built-in adapter. My speed instantly increased to 107Mbps!

I see on Amazon that the adapter now costs £13, though it only cost me £7 when I bought it. I now recommend this to my family and friends who have older computers but new routers.

Peter Langridge

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk



OFFICE

Make your comment indicator bigger in LibreOffice Calc

I use a complex LibreOffice Calc spreadsheet for stock control, which contains quite a lot of comments in various cells on numerous sheets to remind me what formulas I've used when I mess things up. At one time a coloured triangle in the top-right corner of a cell indicated where there were comments. However, in recent versions LibreOffice made this indicator smaller, so that – for me anyway – it's almost invisible.

In the latest version (25.2.0) I've spotted a way to make this indicator easier to see. Open a spreadsheet in Calc, then click Tools at the top followed by Options that appears at the bottom. Click 'LibreOffice' on the left followed by Advanced, then the Open Expert Configuration button (see screenshot 1 above).

This opens a window, which I'd suggest leaving alone unless you know what you're doing. But in the search bar at the top you should type noteindicator, then click the 'search' button. Now double-click Display and change the number to something like '20' to start with (see screenshot 2).

Now click OK twice and check the size of the indicator triangles. If they're still too small, go back and increase the number. I found I had to move about the sheet for the change to take place.

Bob Farish

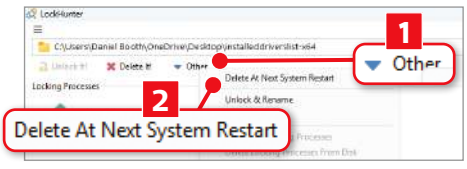
SOFTWARE

Delete locked files before your PC boots

As you advised in Issue 703 (page 56) I've used LockHunter (www.snipca.com/53593) to rename several files that Windows had locked, for whatever reason. On a few occasions it hasn't been able to unlock a file when I click 'Delete It!'. I wonder if this is because it won't unlock while Windows is open.

Instead, I've had to resort to clicking the Other dropdown menu (1 in our screenshot below) and selecting 'Delete At Next System Restart' 2. This seems to schedule the file for deletion before Windows fully boots when I next restart my laptop. So far this has always done the trick, and supports my theory that these files couldn't be deleted originally because I had Windows open.

Michael Potts



Browser Tips

EDGE

Control how much memory Edge uses

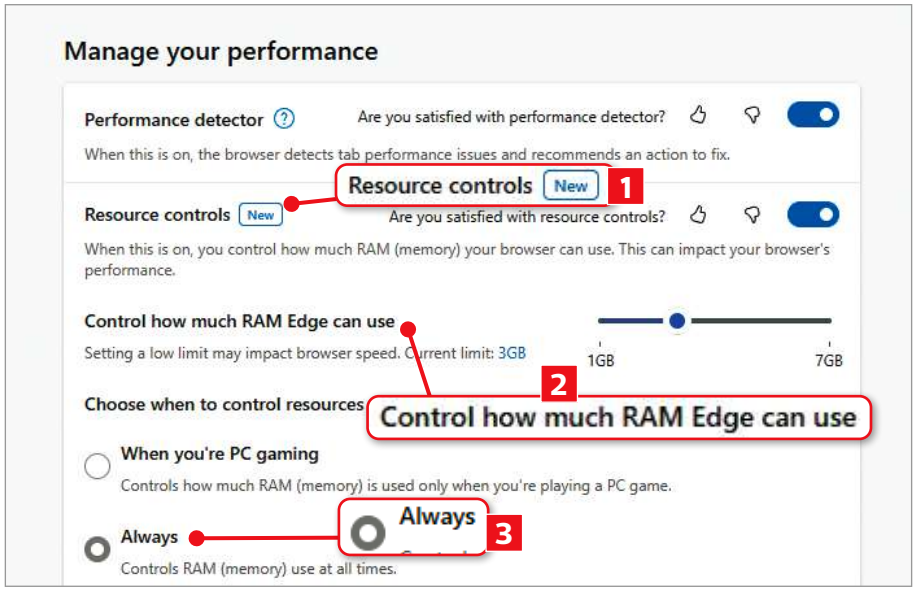
Edge doesn't use as much memory as Chrome and Firefox – it's actually the lightest of the main browsers in terms of the system resources it uses. But when you have lots of tabs open and extensions installed, it may consume RAM that's needed by other programs.

To prevent Edge from hogging memory, Microsoft has added a 'Resource controls' option, which lets you limit how much RAM the browser can use. It's mainly intended for when you're playing games on your PC, but is equally useful when performing other resource-intensive tasks such as editing videos.

To activate this new feature in Edge 134 (released in March), click the three-dot menu button top right and choose Settings followed by 'System and performance'. Scroll down to the 'Manage your performance' section and switch on the new 'Resource controls' option (1 in our screenshot below).

Drag the 'Control how much RAM Edge can use' slider 2 to set the maximum amount of memory you want to allocate to the browser. You can either limit RAM usage only when you're playing PC games or choose 'Always' 3 to control it all at all times.

Edge will automatically detect how much memory is available on your system. Make sure you don't set the RAM slider too low or the browser may become slow and unresponsive.


Manage your performance
Performance detector
Are you satisfied with performance detector?
When this is on, the browser detects tab performance issues and recommends an action to fix.
Resource controls
New
1
Resource controls
New
Are you satisfied with resource controls?
When this is on, you control how much RAM (memory) your browser can use. This can impact your browser's performance.
Control how much RAM Edge can use
Setting a low limit may impact browser speed. Current limit: 3GB
1GB
7GB
2
Choose when to control resources
Control how much RAM Edge can use
When you're PC gaming
Controls how much RAM (memory) is used only when you're playing a PC game.
Always
Always
3
Controls RAM (memory) use at all times.

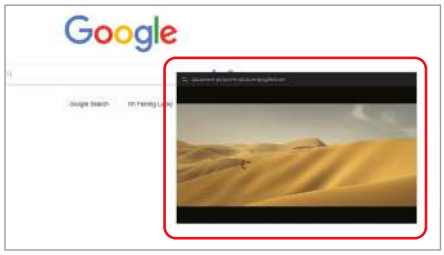
CHROME & FIREFOX

Switch to picture-in-picture automatically

To watch a video in picture-in-picture (PiP) mode in Chrome, you need to right-click the video – twice, if it's on YouTube – and choose 'Picture-in-picture' in the menu that opens. Alternatively, the video player may have a 'Picture-in-picture' button you can click. This moves the video to a floating player window (see screenshot below), so you can keep watching it while browsing other sites.

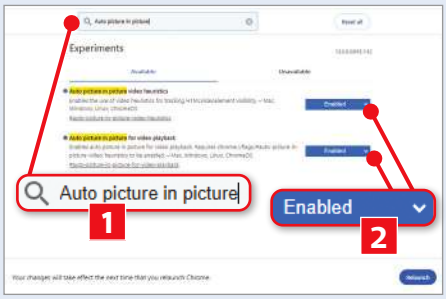
Chrome 134 (released in early March) introduces the option to activate picture-in-picture mode automatically when you switch to another tab. This saves you having to right-click a video to move it to a PiP window, so it won't stop playing when you leave the current tab.

The new 'automatic picture-in-picture' feature is being rolled out gradually, and currently only works on selected sites. At the time of writing, it doesn't work on YouTube, which is a rather curious omission. It also requires videos to be playing – with sound – for a few seconds, before they can be moved to a PIP player. See our Workshop below to learn how to

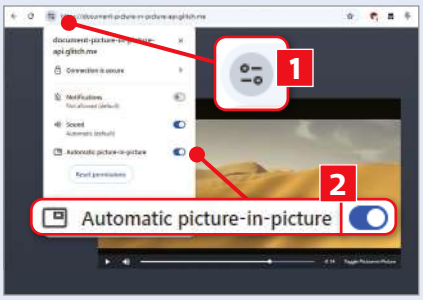


WORKSHOP Turn on 'Automatic picture-in-picture' in Chrome

1 Click Chrome's three-dot menu top right and choose Settings, then 'Privacy and security' 1. Click 'Site settings' then 'Additional permissions' and select 'Automatic picture-in-picture'. Under 'Default behaviour', switch on 'Sites can enter picture-in-picture automatically' 2.



2 If you don't see the option, type chrome://flags in the address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Search for 'Auto picture in picture' 1 and choose Enabled in the dropdown menus for both results 2. Click 'Relaunch' to apply the change.

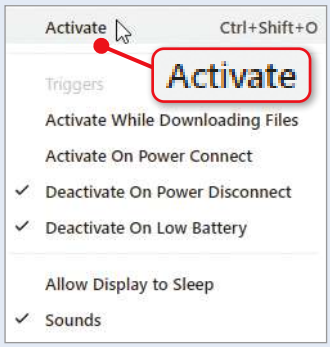


3 To check if the feature is available on the site you're visiting, click the 'View site information' button on the left-hand side of the address bar 1 and look for the 'Automatic picture-in-picture' option 2. If it's switched off, turn it on and reload the page.

BEST EXTENSION FOR... Keeping your PC awake

Stay Awake
Chromium
www.snipca.com/54004

Your PC's default power settings put it to sleep and turn off your screen when it's been idle for a certain length of time. Although this helps save electricity, it's annoying to have to wake it up after leaving your desk for a few minutes. Stay Awake solves this problem by keeping your system and screen active for as long as you want. Simply click its toolbar button and choose Activate (see screenshot) to override your PC's power settings.



Usefully, you can specify conditions for activating the extension, such as when you're downloading files or when your laptop is plugged in. It can be deactivated when your laptop battery is low, and set to switch off your monitor without putting your system to sleep.

If you don't like that, try...
Keep Awake
Chromium
www.snipca.com/54005

This extension offers two separate options for keeping your system or your screen awake, but has no other settings you can configure.

enable automatic picture-in-picture in Chrome.

Coincidentally, Mozilla has added an automatic picture-in-picture feature to Firefox, though it's currently an experiment. To turn it on, click the browser's three-line menu button top right and choose Settings then Firefox Labs. Select the option 'Picture-in-Picture: auto-open on tab switch'.

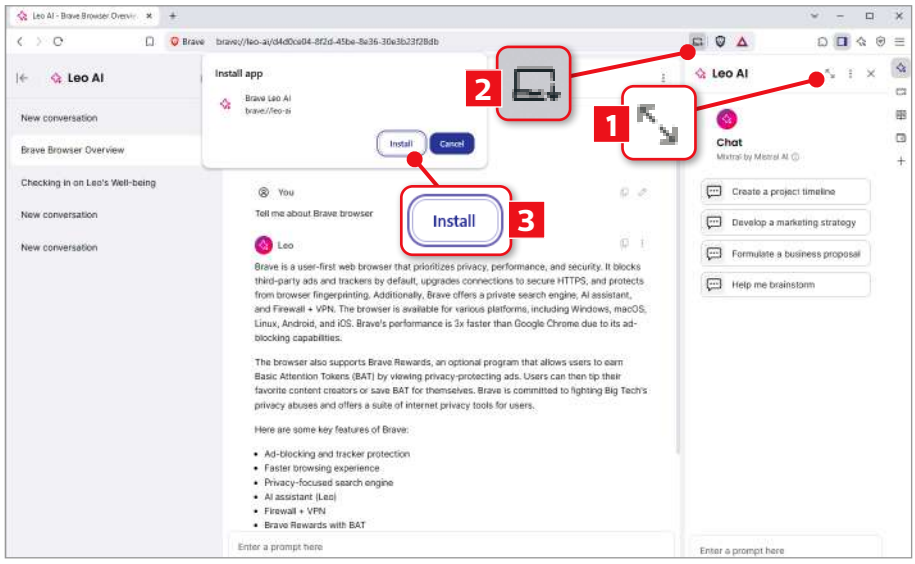
BRAVE
Chat with Leo AI in a browser tab or progressive web app

Brave has added new ways to interact more easily with its AI assistant Leo. Previously, you could only access Leo in the browser's side panel, by clicking the Leo AI button on the top-right toolbar or right-hand sidebar. This panel also opens when you right-clicked selected text on a web page and chose one of the 'Leo AI tools', such as Summarise or Paraphrase.

As of Brave 1.75.175 (released in February), you can chat to Leo in the main browser window, which gives you more space to type questions and prompts, and to read the chatbot's replies. Simply click the 'Open full page' (double-arrow) button in the top-right corner of the Leo side panel (1 in our screenshot below) to switch your conversation to a full tab. This also lets you see your chat history on the left-hand side of the page.

You can access the page directly by typing brave://leo-ai into Brave's address bar, and also turn Leo into a progressive web app (PWA). This allows you to chat to Leo in its own window on your desktop, independently of the browser.

Click the 'Install Brave Leo AI' button in the address bar – this looks like a monitor with a down arrow 2 – and click Install 3 to install the PWA in Brave and on your PC. A shortcut to Brave Leo AI will be added to the Windows Start menu and you can also pin a shortcut to the taskbar.

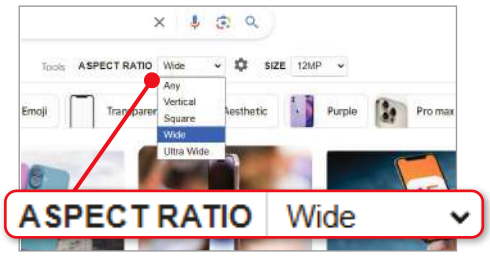


CHROMIUM
Add useful filters to Google Images searches

Google Images lets you filter your search results by criteria including size, colour, usage rights and type. It also has an aspect-ratio filter, which displays tall, square or wide images, and a precise image-size filter that lets you specify a minimum file size. However, these are tucked away on its Advanced Image Search page (www.snipca.com/54009).

A new extension called Google Images Enhancer (www.snipca.com/54010) places these filters where they should be – directly above your Google Images search results. Click the Aspect Ratio dropdown menu (see screenshot below) to choose between Vertical, Square, Wide and Ultra Wide images. Click the Size menu to see pictures ranging from one-megapixel to 70-megapixels minimum size.

Because it's a new extension, you may get an Enhanced Safe Browsing warning, but it's safe to use so just click 'Continue to install'. Refresh the page if the filters don't appear at first.



Phone and Tablet Tips

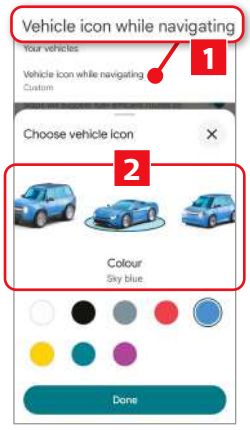
ANDROID & iOS

Customise your vehicle icon in Google Maps

Since 2020, Google Maps has let you change the icon that represents your vehicle on the map when you're viewing driving directions. Rather than stick with the default 'blue arrow in white circle', you could choose between a red sedan, yellow SUV or green pick-up truck.

Google has now updated the feature to let you customise the appearance of the vehicle icon with additional colours and less generic designs. This allows you to make it better match your actual car or one you'd like to be driving if you could afford it – such as a black Porsche.

To change your vehicle icon, tap the blue Directions button in Google Maps, search for a destination and select driving directions. In the Drive panel that opens, tap the 'Trip options' icon in the top-right corner and choose 'Vehicle icon while navigating' (1 in our screenshot right). Alternatively, press Start to view your driving route and tap the vehicle icon on the map.

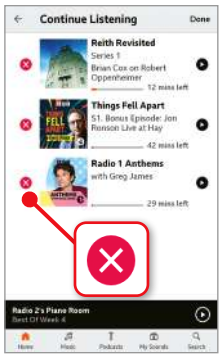


When the 'Choose vehicle icon' panel opens, select your preferred colour and model. The new options include a sports car, hatchback and an offroad vehicle, with eight new colours to choose from, including sky blue 2, aqua green and ash grey. Tap 'Done' to save your preference and show your updated vehicle on the map.

ANDROID & iOS

Clear your listening history in BBC Sounds

Like the 'Continue watching' feature on TV-streaming services, the BBC Sounds app for Android (www.snipca.com/54018) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54019) has a Continue Listening list on its Home screen. This lets you quickly resume playing radio programmes and podcasts you haven't finished, or the next episodes of a series you've subscribed to.



However, it also means anyone who looks at the app can see what you've been listening to. More annoyingly, your Continue Listening list may include radio shows you didn't care for and have no desire to return to.

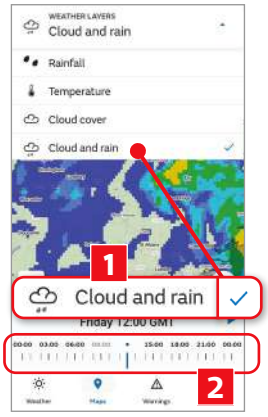
To address these concerns, BBC Sounds has added the much requested option to remove items from your Continue Listening list. Tap the 'Manage list' link on your Home screen, then tap Edit in the top-right corner. Press the red X icon next to a programme or podcast to remove it from the list (see screenshot left), then tap Done.

ANDROID & iOS

View new layers on Met Office weather maps

The Met Office has updated its app for Android (www.snipca.com/54022) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54023) with two new map layers. One overlays temperature data on the map, while the other displays cloud and rain information.

To use the new layers, press the Maps tab at the bottom of the app. Tap the Weather Layers menu and choose either Temperature or 'Cloud and rain' (1 in our screenshot right).



The Temperature layer shows the temperature both as Celsius values in circular map markers, and by colour-coding – the warmer the colour, the warmer the weather. The 'Cloud and rain' layer provides a key to the Met Office data – for example, blue indicates light rain, while yellow and red areas can expect heavy downpours.

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

Non Stop Radio

Free

Android www.snipca.com/54016

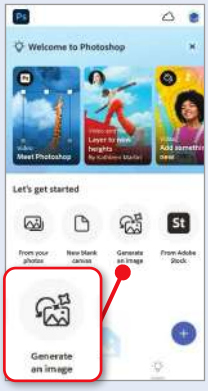
This app lets you listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world. You can search the stations by category – such as Rock, Classical or News – or by country (from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe), and tune in with a single tap. Non Stop Radio lets you save favourite stations to return to later and tap through to broadcasters' websites.

Adobe Photoshop

Free*

iOS www.snipca.com/54015

Adobe's new Photoshop app brings the "power and precision" of its desktop photo editor to your iPhone or iPad (an Android version is coming later this year). It includes layers and masks, a Spot Healing Brush for cleaning up blemishes and AI-powered options for generating images (see screenshot) and removing unwanted elements from photos.



Candy Crush Solitaire

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/54024

iOS www.snipca.com/54031

The latest addition to the popular Candy Crush series applies its colourful graphics and relaxing music to the classic card game Solitaire. Collect coins and boosters as you complete each level to unlock further levels and receive help when you get stuck. As usual with Candy Crush, you can buy coins if required, priced from £1.69 a pack.

*Contains in-app purchases

Both layers let you view their weather maps for the next five days by scrolling the timeline at the bottom 2. Other layers display 'Cloud cover' and Rainfall separately.

iOS

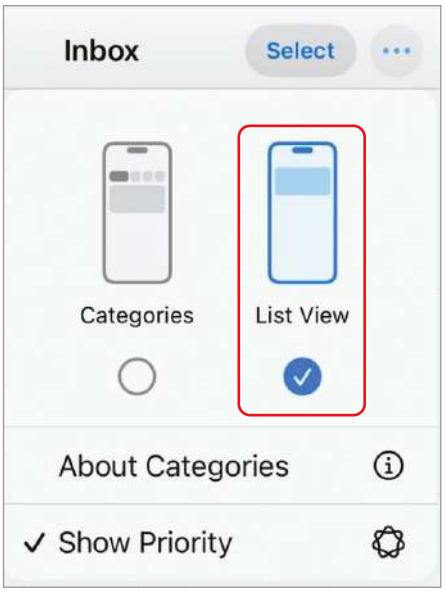
Undo unpopular changes to Apple Mail

One of the most controversial 'improvements' in iOS 18.2 (released last December) was the redesigned Apple Mail app. This introduced a feature called Mail Categories, which separates emails in your inbox into categories such as Primary, Transactions, Updates and Promotions.

Gmail has long offered similar categories, but many Apple Mail users aren't happy with the change, complaining that they're now missing important messages that have been categorised without flagging them as unread. Additionally, the app now shows 'contact photos' next to email senders, which some users say makes the interface look cluttered.

Thankfully, it's possible to undo both these changes and revert Apple Mail to its previous, more streamlined design. To remove Mail Categories from your inbox, simply press the three-dot icon in the top-right corner of the app and switch from Categories to List View (see screenshot below). This will display all your emails in a single integrated list.

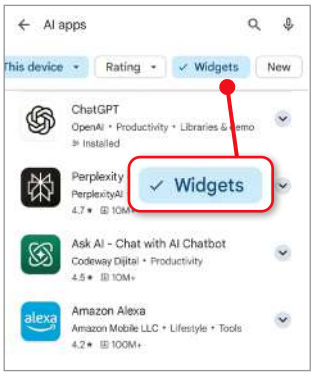
To hide contact photos, open the Settings app on your iPhone or iPad and tap Apps, then Mail. In the Message List section, switch off the option Show Contact Photos.



ANDROID

Find apps with widgets more easily

Widgets offer a useful way to interact with and view information from apps directly from your home screen, without needing to open them first. The Google Play Store has made it easier to find Android apps that include widgets by adding a dedicated Widgets filter.



When you search for apps in the Play Store app, you'll now see a Widgets filter in the row of options at the top of the screen (see screenshot left). Tap this to show only apps that have their own widgets. Google will also soon start showing a Widget badge on the pages of apps that offer widgets.

To access installed widgets on your Android phone or tablet, long-press the home screen and select Widgets. Press a widget and drag it to the desired position.

BEST APPS FOR... Boosting your mobile security

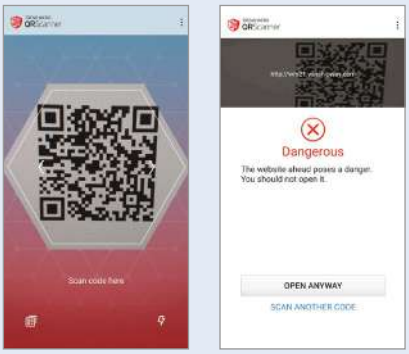
QR Scanner

Free

Android www.snipca.com/54027

This app from Trend Micro protects you from dodgy QR codes. It alerts you when codes you scan with your phone's camera link to malicious and suspicious websites, so you can avoid opening them (safe links can be set to open automatically). To get the feature on iOS, install Trend Micro's Mobile Security app (www.snipca.com/54028).

Best For Scanning risky QR codes



VirusTotal Mobile

Free

Android www.snipca.com/54032

This third-party (but officially endorsed) app for VirusTotal uses 75 antivirus engines to scan all the apps on your phone or tablet to reveal any security and privacy concerns. It informs you of malware threats it's detected and highlights suspicious permissions. If an app isn't in VirusTotal's database, you can send it for analysis.

Best For Checking apps for malware

Sophos Intercept X

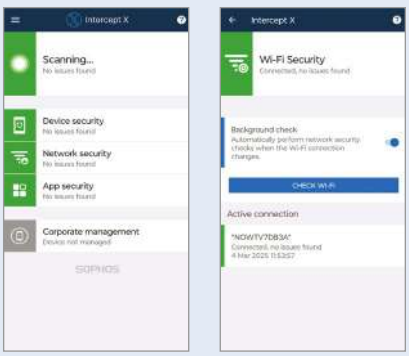
Free

Android www.snipca.com/54035

iOS www.snipca.com/54034

Sophos Intercept X scans your entire phone or tablet for security threats – checking apps, system settings, file downloads and more. Its 'Web Filtering' feature protects you from malicious websites and it also validates links in emails and detects changes to your Wi-Fi network. Unlike most security apps, it's completely free with no ads.

Best For Scanning your entire device

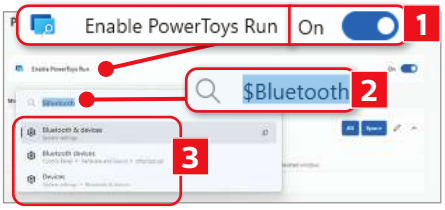


WINDOWS 10 & 11

Access settings using PowerToys Run

Press Windows key+R and you'll open the Run tool, letting you type commands to launch programs, open system tools, or access files and folders. It's a decent tool that's been in Windows for many years, but the Run equivalent in PowerToys is faster and works with more commands.

One of the most useful is typing $ (dollar sign) to find a section in Settings. First, open PowerToys (or install it from www.snipca.com/54037), then click System Tools on the left followed by PowerToys Run. Make sure the 'Enable PowerToys Run' slider is on (1 in our screenshot below), then press Alt+Spacebar. In our example we've typed $Bluetooth 2 and been given three Bluetooth sections in Windows settings to open 3.

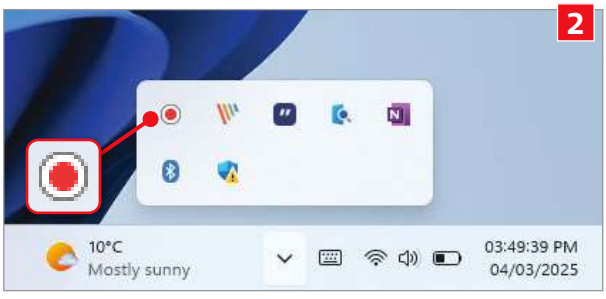


WINDOWS 10 & 11

Record your screen without control toolbar

Screen-recording tool PicPick (https://picpick.app) is an excellent alternative to the built-in options in Windows, though you can only record two minutes in the free edition. Version 7.3.2, released in late February, removes its control toolbar as you record your screen. This means you can show more of your screen in your recordings. And you don't have to do anything – it happens by default.

To record a screen in PicPick, launch it then click Screen Recorder followed by the 'REC' button (see screenshot 1 below left). The bar will then disappear. To cancel the recording click the 'Show hidden icons' button in the system tray followed by the red circular button (see screenshot 2).



WINDOWS 10 & 11

See which devices have made DHCP requests on your PC

DHCPLogView
File Edit View Options Help
Request Time
MAC Address
MAC Address Com...
Requested IP
Host ...
Vendor Class...
User Class
FRL
Operating System
17/02/25 15:37:33 18-26-49-7... Intel Corporate 192.168.0.38 DESK... MSFT 5.0 1:3:6:f:1f:... Windows 10/11/2019
17/02/25 15:38:43 08-00-27-A... PCS Systemtechnik... 192.168.0.73 hd MSFT 5.0 1:f:3:6:2c:... Windows Vista/7/200
17/02/25 15:40:28 10-E7-C6-C... Hewlett Packard 192.168.0.37 HPCD... HP Printer Mfg=HP... 1:79:21:3:...
17/02/25 15:44:00 EE-D0-80-C... 192.168.0.44 nir12... android-dhc... 1:3:6:f:1a:... Android 14
17/02/25 15:45:33 B4-F1-DA-B... LG Electronics (Mob... 192.168.0.36 andro... android-dhc... 1:3:6:f:1a:... Android 8.1.0
5 item(s), 1 Selected
NirSoft Freeware. https://www.nirsoft.net

Every time a device connects to your network it sends a DHCP (Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol) request to get an IP address. This helps it to connect smoothly. You can see these requests in a new program from NirSoft – one of our favourite independent software developers.

This information can help you solve connection problems. For example, if a device has sent a request but hasn't connected, then you can check for problems like an incorrect Wi-Fi password, signal interference or faults with the device's network adapter.

Install DHCPLogView by visiting www.snipca.com/54040 then scrolling down and clicking the 32bit or 64bit link. Windows might show a warning, but it's safe to use, so click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

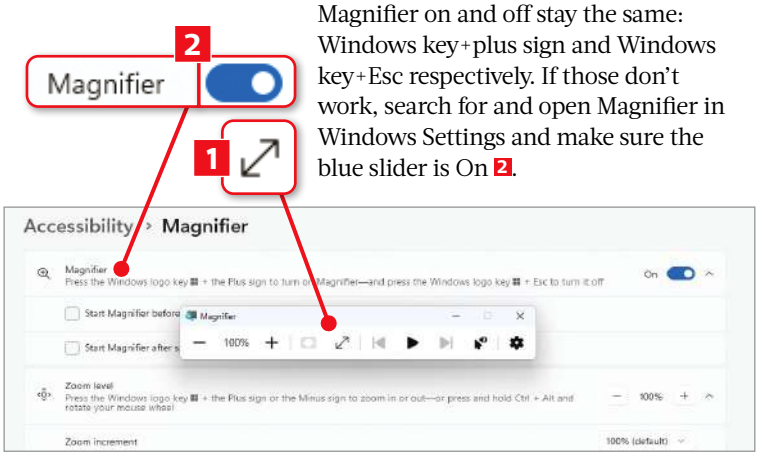
Run the tool then copy one of the MAC addresses in the column (see screenshot). Paste this into a MAC 'look up' site like https://macaddress.io. This will tell you the manufacturer responsible for the MAC address, helping you to identify the device.

WINDOWS 11

Use keyboard shortcut in Magnifier

In update KB5050092, released in January, Microsoft added a keyboard shortcut to the Magnifier tool in Windows 11. Press Ctrl+Alt+minus sign and you'll switch between the current zoom level and 200%. There's also a new button that resets Magnifier to the previous zoom level (1 in our screenshot below).

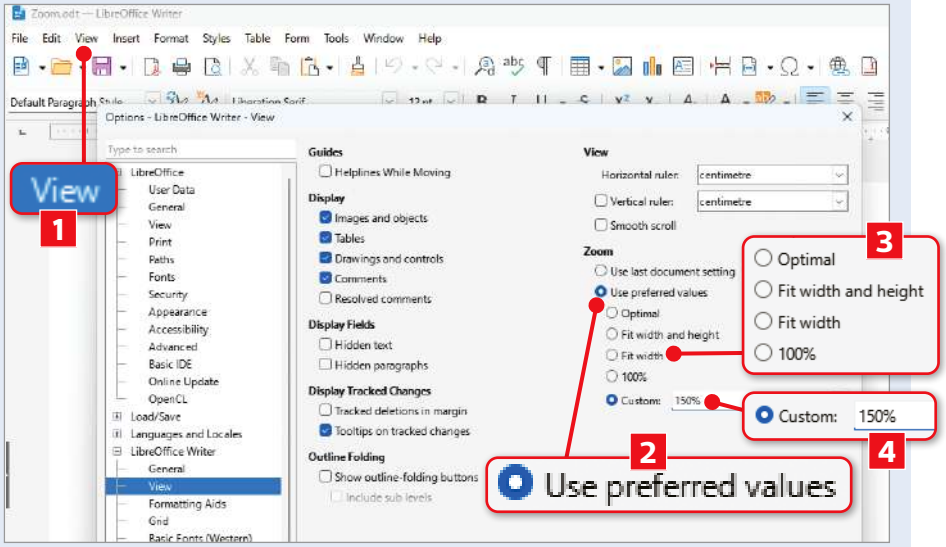
The keyboard shortcuts for turning Magnifier on and off stay the same: Windows key+plus sign and Windows key+Esc respectively. If those don't work, search for and open Magnifier in Windows Settings and make sure the blue slider is On 2.

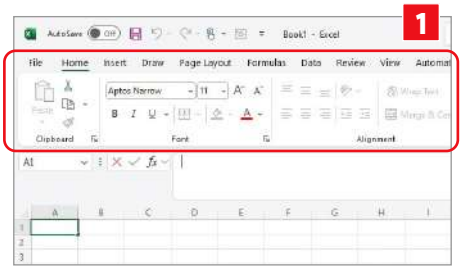


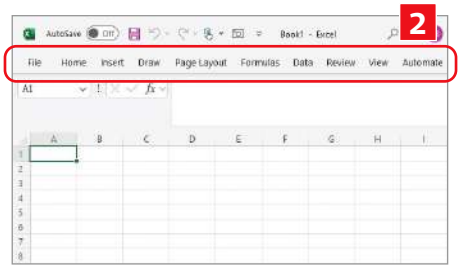
LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Set your preferred zoom level in documents

In previous versions of LibreOffice Writer, if you saved a document when you were zoomed in it would reopen at that same level of zoom. Version 25.2, released in February, gives you the option to override this, so documents will open at the same zoom level every time. Click Tools at the top, then Options at the bottom (or press Alt+F12). Next, click LibreOffice Writer in the menu on the left followed by View (1 in our screenshot). Now select 'Use preferred values' 2 under the Zoom heading and choose the type of zoom you want. LibreOffice gives you four options 3, or you can choose your own zoom level by selecting Custom and typing a percentage 4.







MICROSOFT OFFICE

Collapse ribbon when you make spreadsheet smaller

By default, when you click the top-right 'Restore Down' icon to make your document, presentation or spreadsheet smaller, all the ribbon functions in the tab you've got open remain in view (see screenshot 1). If you find this cluttered, you can collapse the ribbon so you only see the tabs 2. Click File, then Options at the bottom. Now click General on the left and tick 'Collapse the ribbon automatically' 3.

MICROSOFT WORD

Use shortcuts for endnotes, footnotes and index entries

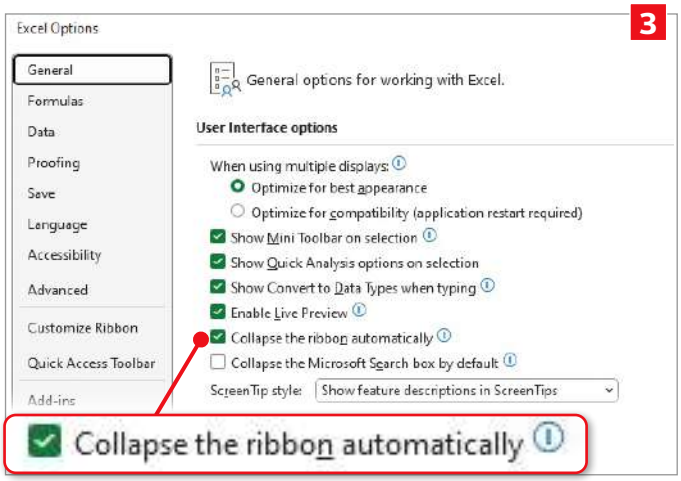
Microsoft Word has several keyboard shortcuts that make it easier to add endnotes and footnotes in documents, and mark an index entry.

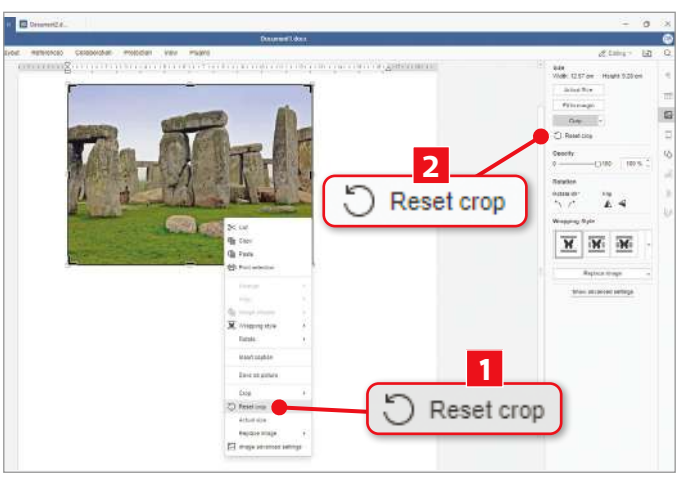
For endnotes press Alt+Shift+D; for footnotes press Alt+Shift+F; and for index entries press Alt+Shift+X. You can go to the next footnote by pressing Alt+Shift+Right angle bracket (›), and to the previous by pressing Alt+Shift+Left angle bracket (‹).

ONLYOFFICE

Reset crops in right-click menu

OnlyOffice 8.3.0, released in February, adds a 'Reset crop' option to reverse all the crops you've made to an image, taking it back to the original. Once you've cropped an image, you'll see the reset option by right-clicking it (1 in our screenshot below) or in the right-hand panel 2. It works in all of OnlyOffice's tools.





In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Pick competition winners at random

Printing names and picking them out of a hat is one way to decide club competition winners, but there are slicker and more entertaining methods you can use.

Spin the wheel of names for a more entertaining way of picking competition winners

Use Random.org's True Random Number Generator

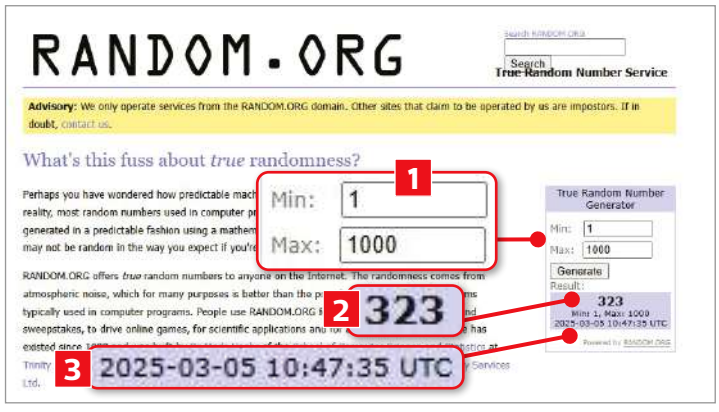
The simplest way to pick a winner is to get a random number from Random.org, which launched way back in 1998 (just a few months after *Computeractive*).

Built by Dr Mads Haahr of the School of Computer Science and Statistics at Trinity College, Dublin, it picks up signals from radio receivers or antennas, and electromagnetic noise from the atmosphere, such as that generated by lightning or solar activity. This "atmospheric noise" is used to randomise numbers. Dr Haahr says this is true randomness, unlike "pseudorandom" algorithms used by software.

First, number your competition entries in a document, form or spreadsheet. Now visit www.random.org then in the True Random Number Generator box choose a minimum and maximum number that corresponds with your list (1 in our screenshot below). The maximum goes up to 1 billion, so unless your club has more members than the population of Europe you should be fine! Click 'Generate' and the random number will appear 2, along with the time and date it was created (which might help to authenticate the result with members) 3.

Google also has a random number generator. Type random number into Google, set your minimum and maximum (again it's 1 billion) and click Generate.

Note that clicking the share icon top right only sends a link to the number generator itself, not the number you generated. Unlike Random.org, Google uses an algorithm to generate a number, so strictly speaking it's less random – but it's still fine for picking a competition winner.


RANDOM.ORG
True Random Number Service
Advisory: We only operate services from the RANDOM.ORG domain. Other sites that claim to be operated by us are impostors. If in doubt, contact us.
What's this fuss about true randomness?
Min: 1
Max: 1000
1
2 323
3 2025-03-05 10:47:35 UTC
True Random Number Generator
Generate
Result:
323

Random.org will generate a random winning number, and give a time and date

Add competition entrants to a spinning wheel

You can use these number generators during a live presentation to your members, but it lacks a little drama. For more entertainment, use the wheel spinner at https://wheelofnames.com. Type competition entrants' names on the right (1 in our screenshot above) and they'll be added to the wheel on the left 2.

If you have too many to type, you can import them as a Google spreadsheet by clicking More at the top right. Click 'Shuffle' at the top to change the position of the names in the wheel, and 'Add image' to add a background image, a centre image (for example, your club logo), or an image instead of a name.

Tick the Advanced box 3 and you'll see options for changing the colour for specific names. You can also change the size of a person's segment in the wheel, though this obviously alters their chance of winning.

You can even change the sound for each person when they win. By default it's applause and whooping, but alternatives include a fanfare, fireworks, an old phone ringing and the name of the person spoken aloud. You'll see these options by clicking the blue filter icon and clicking the Sound dropdown menu. Below there's a box for adding a pop-up message too.

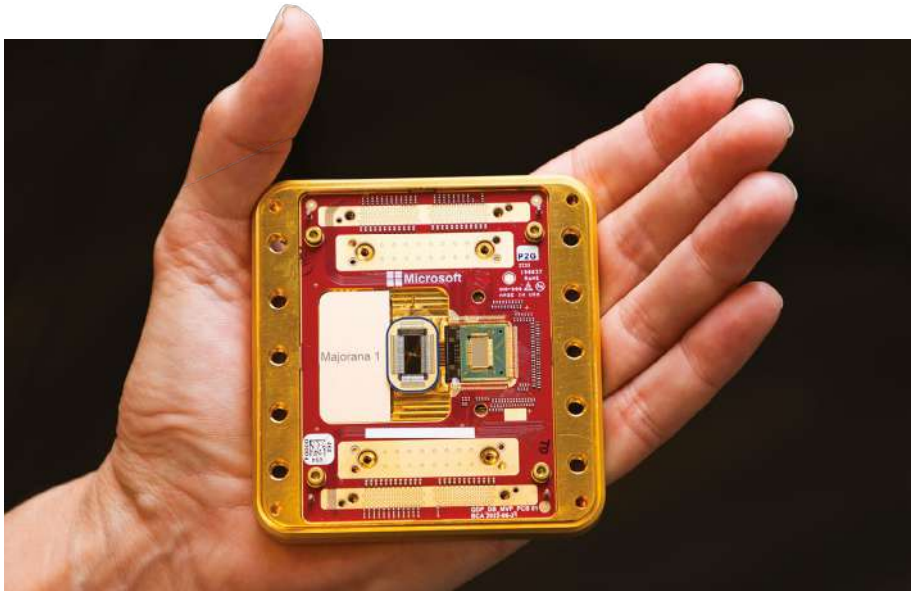
Click 'Customise' at the top for more options, including how fast and how long you want the wheel to spin and any sound effects as it does so. You'll notice here that the maximum number of names is 1,000. Click Save if you want to save this wheel (including the names) for future spins. Once you're ready, click the wheel to make it spin and it'll pick a winner 4. You'll see past results at the top of the list of names on the right.

Next issue: Automatically add survey answers to Google

What's All the Fuss About...

Majorana 1

Microsoft claims it's a computing breakthrough, but experts aren't convinced



What is it?

A new processor (pictured right) from Microsoft that it claims is a "transformative leap toward practical quantum computing". It's caused a stir because the company says it's the first processor to use topological qubits.

Topological *what*?

This might take some explaining. Let's start with bits – these are the basic units of information in computing, and can be 0 or 1 depending on the data being processed. But you probably knew that already. Qubits are quantum bits that can be 0, 1 or both at the same time, thanks to a weird property in quantum physics called superposition. This allows quantum computers to handle much more data and perform complex calculations thousands of times faster than regular computers. Yet they have a fundamental flaw.

Which is...?

They're incredibly fragile and can be easily disturbed by changes in their environment, such as noise, temperature and electromagnetic interference. This sensitivity causes qubits to lose their information easily, leading to errors – a problem that has held back quantum computers. But according to a Microsoft paper published in the scientific journal *Nature* (www.snipca.com/54182), the topological qubits used by Majorana 1 solve this by storing data in a way that's protected from interference. This makes them more stable and less prone to errors. Think of spinning plates and knots tied in a rope.

OK. But how is that relevant?

Well, regular qubits are like spinning plates. Keep them balanced and they perform amazing tricks, but the slightest nudge sends them crashing down. Topological qubits, on the other hand, are more like knots in a rope. Tug or shake the rope all you like, but the knots should stay intact. We'd like to think Ettore Majorana (1906–38) would have approved of that analogy.

Ettore Majorana: Italian physicist whom Microsoft has named its new processor after

Who's he?

The Italian physicist (pictured below) Microsoft named the processor after. He predicted the existence of quantum particles called fermions that are their own antiparticles – like coins with identical sides. Normally, particles and antiparticles cancel each other out, but these don't, making them extremely stable and ideal for quantum computing. Microsoft's apparent breakthrough is harnessing these particles, called 'zero modes', to build its topological qubits. Working with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the US, Microsoft wants to build a super-computer based on topological qubits "in years, not decades".

Great, but what would it actually be able to do?

Infinitely more than your humble PC can. Microsoft says it could "lead to innovations like self-healing materials that repair cracks in bridges, sustainable agriculture, and safer chemical discovery", saving billions of dollars in research (see www.snipca.com/54172). But not all experts are convinced. Indeed, one called Majorana 1 a "fraudulent project".

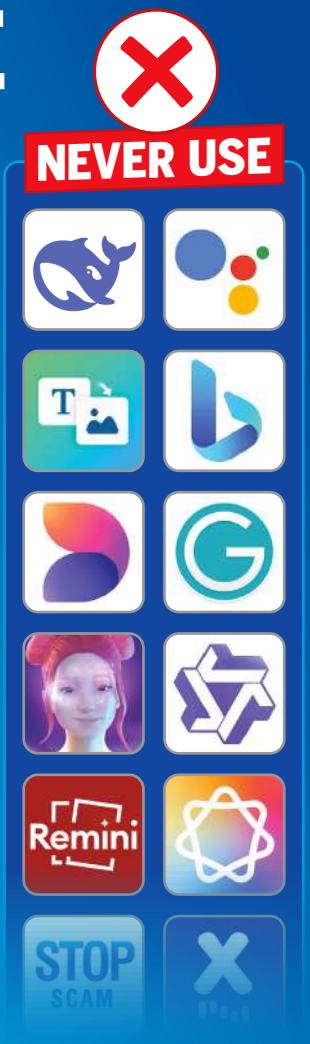
Blimey. Who was that?

Sergey Frolov, a physics professor at Pittsburgh University. He told *The Register* website that the underlying science hadn't been established. He's not alone. Simone Severini, Amazon's head of quantum technologies, said Microsoft's paper in *Nature* "doesn't actually demonstrate" the use of topological qubits, while Professor Arka Majumdar from Washington University said Microsoft's claims were "sensational" and "overhyped".

So who's right?

Boring answer, but we'll have to wait and see. Many scientists are sceptical because twice in recent years Microsoft rowed back on claims about quantum breakthroughs following wider scrutiny. Microsoft will have to do something special to win them over. So if you have any cracked bridges that need repairing, drop them a line.

YOUR COMPLETE AI GUIDE



Don't waste time and money on rubbish and overpriced AI. Robert Irvine reveals 20 superb tools you must use, and 20 to avoid, to make the most of the new technology

From AI-written articles on news websites to deepfake videos on social media and fake songs on streaming services, the web is awash with content created using artificial intelligence. The trouble is that a large proportion of this is, frankly, rubbish.

There's even a term for it: 'AI slop', defined as "filler content produced by AI tools that prioritise speed and quantity over substance and quality" (www.snipca.com/54137). Now that anyone can generate text, pictures, video and audio at the click of a button, the slop floodgates are well and truly open.

Thankfully, there are still lots of good AI tools that provide reliable information, produce high-quality content and perform genuinely useful tasks. Although you sometimes need to pay for their premium features, you'll be surprised and impressed by how much you can now do for free.

Here, we round up 20 of the best examples of AI technology done properly. These include clever new options in popular chatbots, fantastic free image and video generators, superior search engines to Google and innovative ways to boost your online security.

We also reveal 20 awful AI tools you should avoid, whether because of their rip-off prices, dubious privacy policies or poor-quality results. Stick with our recommendations to make the most of the new technology – without the slop.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Hold natural conversations with ChatGPT's Advanced Voice Mode
- Generate high-quality images from text prompts
- Create AI videos without paying for a subscription
- Compose your own music in your browser using AI
- Scan emails and text messages for phishing scams
- Upscale photos and videos without losing quality
- Convert documents and web pages into a podcast

BEST PAID-FOR AI TOOLS THAT ARE NOW FREE

1 ChatGPT Advanced Voice Mode

www.snipca.com/54046

ChatGPT's Advanced Voice Mode lets you hold natural voice conversations with the chatbot through its website and apps (www.snipca.com/54047). Previously, the feature was only available to ChatGPT Plus and Pro subscribers, though free users could try it for 10 minutes each month before being reverted to standard voice mode.

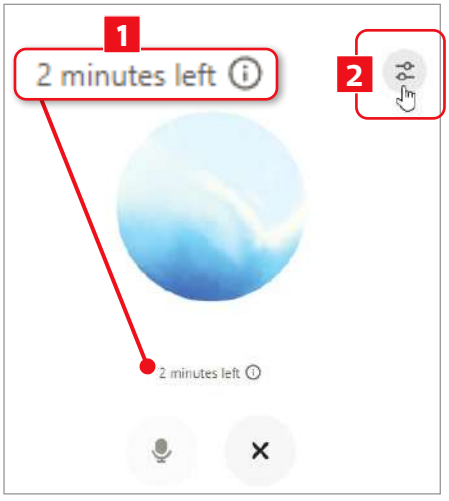
In February, OpenAI launched a new version of Advanced Voice Mode based on its GPT-4o mini model. This means everyone can now interact with ChatGPT like they're chatting to a real person.

Advanced Voice Mode mimics the rhythm and even some of the emotions inherent in a human voice. It tailors ChatGPT's responses based on the speed you're talking and when you interrupt it mid-sentence, it won't forget what you were discussing.

The free version of Advanced Voice Mode has a 10-minute daily limit. It tells you how many minutes of usage remain (1 in our screenshot below), and ends the conversation once the limit is reached – you can then start another chat in standard voice mode.

To use Advanced Voice Mode, click or tap the 'Use voice mode' button in the message box. Choose your preferred voice using the Settings button in the top-right corner 2.

In the ChatGPT mobile app, you can keep chatting while using other apps. Select 'Voice' in your account settings and switch on Background Conversations.



ChatGPT's Advanced Voice Mode is now available for longer for free

DON'T USE

Replika

www.snipca.com/54048

Replika takes the 'talk to a real person' concept to extremes. It lets you create your own animated AI chatbot, whose personality develops based on your interactions. It's impressive technology and has been praised for its mental-health benefits – some users claim to have fallen in love with their characters. But there are also privacy concerns about Replika sharing your data – see Mozilla's report at www.snipca.com/54049.

2 Google Gemini's 'Saved info' tool

www.snipca.com/54051

Since our How To feature on Google Gemini in Issue 705 (page 35), the free AI assistant has added a 'Saved info' option, which was previously only available to Advanced subscribers. Similar to ChatGPT's Memory feature, this 'remembers' information you tell the chatbot about yourself to make its responses more personal and relevant.

To access 'Saved info', visit the link above while signed into your Google account. Click the Add button (see screenshot below) to enter details you want the AI tool to remember. Google's examples include 'Use simple language and avoid jargon' and 'I'm vegetarian, so don't suggest recipes with meat'.

Personalise your Google Gemini chats using the 'Saved info' option

You can edit and delete this information, or turn off 'Saved info' to depersonalise your Gemini chats. Any details you add will be synced with the Gemini mobile app.

DON'T USE

Google Assistant

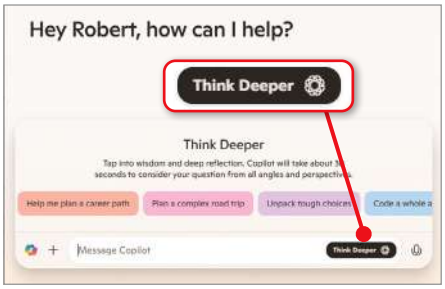
www.snipca.com/54052

With Google's attention now focused on Gemini, Assistant is on the way out – its Android app hasn't been updated for a year and users are experiencing a plethora of bugs. Although it's still useful for controlling smart speakers, TVs and other devices, if you want a more informative and less stilted AI chat, it's time to switch to Gemini.

3 Copilot Think Deeper

www.snipca.com/54054

As with ChatGPT, you can now use Copilot's Voice feature for free, with no daily limit on your spoken commands. Microsoft has also made its Think Deeper option available to all free users of the Copilot website and desktop and mobile apps.



Get better answers from Copilot using its new Think Deeper tool

Think Deeper is designed for complex topics that require more sophisticated responses, such as making an important purchase, assessing the future value of a home renovation or planning a career move. Click the new Think Deeper button (see screenshot above) to see some suggestions, or enter a detailed query of your own. Copilot will take up to 30 seconds to answer, while it considers your question "from all angles and perspectives". It will then give you a comprehensive response based on a large amount of online data.

DON'T USE

DeepSeek

www.deepseek.com

Don't confuse Think Deeper with DeepSeek, the controversial new Chinese chatbot that launched in January. Although it's faster and often more informative than Copilot and ChatGPT, it collects personal and technical information, and its answers are censored by the Chinese Communist Party. Several countries, including Australia, Italy and South Korea, have already banned DeepSeek from government devices.

BEST AI TOOLS FOR CREATING IMAGES & VIDEOS

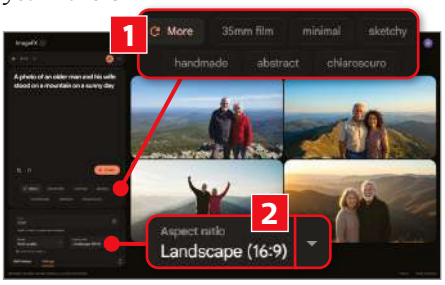
4 ImageFX
www.snipca.com/54057

Generating images from text prompts is one of the most popular uses for AI, but most services set strict limits on how many pictures you can create for free. For example, ChatGPT's basic plan restricts you to three per day.

Google's new ImageFX tool has no specified limit (at least while it's still a Labs experiment) and produces amazing results for any image you describe. Its high-quality photos have realistic lighting and texture, and it creates four variations for each prompt, which you can download and share without a watermark or loss in resolution.

Use the suggested filters below the prompt box (1 in our screenshot below) to edit and enhance generated images, and set your preferred aspect ratio – portrait, landscape 2 or square. The tool can also generate impressively detailed paintings, sketches, cartoons and more.

ImageFX uses Google DeepMind's Imagen 3 text-to-image model, which is now integrated with Gemini – but not yet in the UK.



Google's ImageFX is the best free way to generate images from text

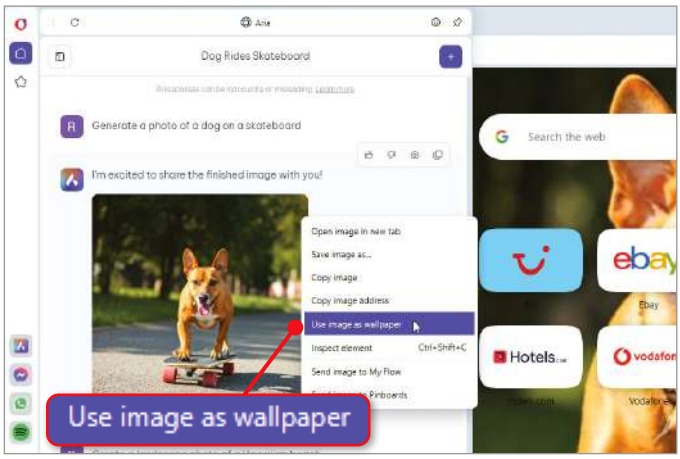
DON'T USE

Microsoft Designer
www.snipca.com/54058

Microsoft Designer recently reduced its free image-generation limit from 60 images a month to a mere 15. It's a versatile tool for creating illustrations and graphics, but its results aren't as impressive as ImageFX. If you use it through Copilot rather than the Designer website or app, you can generate 15 images a day.

5 Opera Aria
Built into Opera

Opera's AI assistant Aria also uses Google's Imagen 3 to generate images. This means you can create pictures from text descriptions directly in the browser's sidebar. These can be saved to your PC and set as Opera's new-tab wallpaper (see screenshot above).


Dog Rides Skateboard
Generate a photo of a dog on a skateboard
I'm excited to share the finished image with you!
Search the web
Use image as wallpaper

Use Opera's built-in AI assistant Aria to generate wallpaper for new tabs in the browser

As with ImageFX, the results are excellent, though you only get one per prompt and none of the Google tool's filters or format options. Aria lets you generate five images a day for free, but when you sign into your Opera account this increases to 30.

DON'T USE

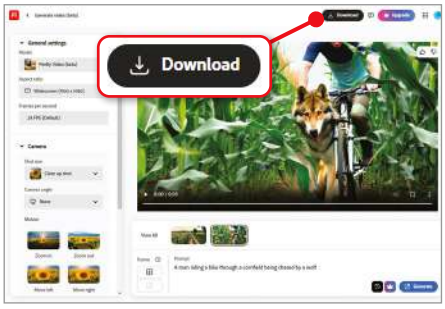
AI Image Generator
www.snipca.com/54063

This Chromium extension turns text into images, but you only get one free credit to do so. It uses DeepSeek to generate pictures and works in a new tab rather than in your browser's sidebar, which makes it both risky and pointless to install.

6 Adobe Firefly Text-to-video
www.snipca.com/54066

Using AI to generate videos is much more resource-intensive than creating images, so it's no wonder you have to pay to do so. Most tools of this nature are freemium, require you to register for an account and restrict you to creating a few seconds of video, which is low-resolution and watermarked. Others, such as OpenAI's new Sora tool (www.snipca.com/54065), are only available with a paid subscription (in Sora's case, to ChatGPT).

You can try text-to-video AI without paying upfront using the new option in Adobe Firefly. This lets you generate two five-second videos for free, though you need to sign up for an Adobe account. You can specify the angle and movement of the camera – such as close-up, aerial or eye-level shot – and download the results (see screenshot above) without a watermark.



Adobe Firefly lets you create and download two short (five-second) videos for free

Firefly's 'Text-to-video' tool isn't perfect – it has trouble rendering human faces and hands – but its results are realistic in appearance and motion. A monthly subscription costs £10 and includes unlimited image generation, but you can switch to a different browser to create another two videos for free.

Hotshot (www.snipca.com/54069) is far better at generating human faces, using an AI model that's been trained on 600 million videos. However, it limits you to creating and downloading three free three-second clips a day, which are watermarked and low resolution. You also need to sign up for an account.

DON'T USE

WanX AI
www.snipca.com/54068

Aside from its unfortunate name (presumably pronounced *wan-ex*), this supposedly free-to-try AI tool makes you go through the hassle of entering a text prompt and uploading a reference image, before telling you to buy a subscription, priced from $15.90 (£12.30) a month. It's also set to share your videos publicly by default.

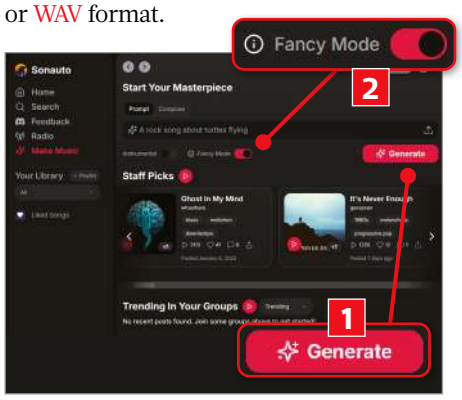
BEST FREE AI TOOLS FOR AUDIO TASKS

7 Sonauto

www.snipca.com/54071

There's a lot of controversy about AI music generators putting musicians and composers out of work and infringing the copyright of existing songs. But the technology is undeniably sophisticated and you don't need to pay to try creating tunes of your own.

The brilliant free tool Sonauto makes this as easy as entering a text prompt – such as 'a rock song about flying turtles' – and clicking the Generate a button (1 in our screenshot below). It will then generate lyrics and two versions of the song, which you can download in OGG or WAV format.



Use Sonauto to create your own music at the click of a button

Alternatively, click the Compose tab to choose a specific musical style and add your own lyrics – or make the track instrumental. Sonauto also has a 'Fancy Mode' 2 that produces higher-quality songs, but takes longer to generate them.

DON'T USE

Suno AI Music

www.snipca.com/54074

Not to be confused with the popular AI music generator Suno (www.suno.com), this rip-off tool gives you two free credits before charging £12 a month (the real Suno offers 50 free credits per day).

If the sample songs on the homepage are anything to judge by, it's not worth a penny.

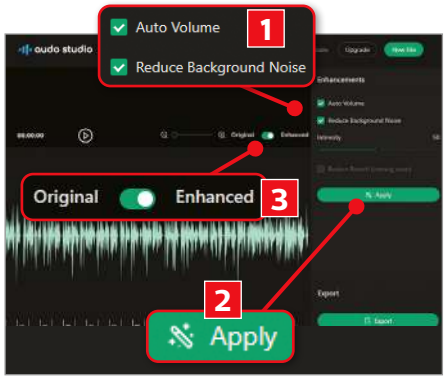
8 Audo Studio

www.snipca.com/54075

Audo Studio uses AI to "automagically" remove background noise and music from audio and video recordings. Upload a file, tick Auto Volume and Reduce Background Noise (1 in our screenshot below), set the Intensity level of the noise reduction then click Apply 2.

You can hear the difference by switching between Original and Enhanced 3. Click 'Export' to download the result in its original file format.

Audio Studio lets you clean up 20 minutes of audio a month before paying $12 (£9.30) for a Creator subscription, which covers up to six hours.



Audo Studio uses AI to remove background noise from recordings

DON'T USE

Xound

www.snipca.com/54076

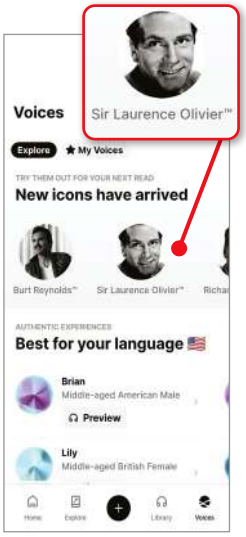
With Xound's free plan, you can remove background noise from 30 minutes of audio or video per month, but only the first 10 seconds of each recording. To clean up the sound of the whole thing, you need to pay $4.99 (£3.87) per file.

9 ElevenLabs

www.snipca.com/54077

ElevenLabs uses AI to convert text into speech, which is handy for creating your own audiobooks and turning documents and emails into audio files for the visually impaired. You can choose from a wide range of non-robotic British and American voices; adjust their speed and style as required; and download the result as an MP3.

The free plan gives you 10,000 credits a month, which equates to 10 minutes of audio. Subscription prices start at a reasonable $5 (£3.88) a month and let you unlock more voices, longer limits and extra features.



ElevenLabs converts text into speech in a voice of your choice, including Sir Laurence Olivier

We particularly like the free ElevenReader app for Android (www.snipca.com/51933) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51934), which reads aloud ebooks, web pages, PDFs and even text you scan with your phone's camera.

Unlike the website, it has no usage limits and you can choose AI-cloned celebrity voices including actors Sir Laurence Olivier (see screenshot above), John Wayne and Burt Reynolds.

DON'T USE

PopPopAI

www.snipca.com/54079

This text-to-speech tool is completely free, with dozens of voices to choose from. But it limits content to 500 characters, and constantly places you in a queue so you quickly lose patience waiting for the conversion.

Transcribe conversations using AI

Google's 'Live Transcribe & notification' app for Android (www.snipca.com/54080) uses AI to transcribe real-world conversations and other speech. It's designed to give deaf and hard-of-hearing users a written record of what's being said directly to them or around them – and can also be used for dictation.

The app works in tandem with the Sound Notifications feature on Android devices, which alerts you to important sounds such as smoke and fire alarms, doorbell rings and door-knocking, and running water. Tap the cog in the bottom-left corner and choose 'Open sound notifications'.

For iOS users, there's a similar app called Live Transcribe (www.snipca.com/54081), but this limits some features to its paid-for plans.

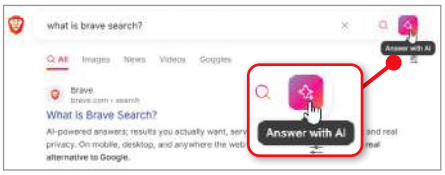
BEST AI TOOLS FOR FINDING INFORMATION

10 Brave Search
www.snipca.com/54094

Google now provides AI Overviews for many search queries. These appear above your main search results and summarise relevant content from online sources to save you visiting those sites individually.

Although potentially useful, AI Overviews can also slow down your searches and sometimes contain incorrect information. Worst of all, the feature can't be turned off or hidden without using a third-party extension such as Hide Google AI Overviews (www.snipca.com/54092).

We prefer Brave Search's equivalent feature 'Answer with AI', which cites its sources, includes an Elaborate button that provides further information and lets you ask follow-up questions. It's also easy to hide – click the 'Quick settings' cog top right and switch off 'Answer with AI'. When you want an AI-generated summary, click the 'Answer with AI' button in the search box (see screenshot below left).



Brave Search lets you decide whether to see AI answers in your search results

DON'T USE

Bing
www.bing.com

Bing now has a 'Chat with Copilot' option that uses Microsoft's chatbot to answer your search queries. But rather than display a summary above your search results and let you ask follow-up questions, it directs you to the Copilot website – which you might as well visit in the first place.

11 Perplexity
www.perplexity.ai

This AI-powered search engine scours "top-tier" online sources to provide concise but informative answers to your queries, then lets you ask follow-up questions. Unlike Google, it's immune to SEO tricks that push poor-quality sites to the top of results, and unlike ChatGPT it doesn't pause to 'think' or search but responds instantly.

Perplexity continuously indexes the web to provide up-to-date information, and is particularly useful for technical help, including explanatory videos. It's free to use, but has a paid-for Pro plan, priced at $20 (£15) a month, that "goes deeper into the specifics of your question" and offers extra AI models and features.

It also has highly rated free apps for Android (www.snipca.com/54097) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54098).

DON'T USE

You.com
www.you.com

You.com is much slower than Perplexity and its AI answers are less accurate. When we asked 'Who is the Prime Minister of the UK?', it showed a picture of former Deputy PM and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab!

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BEST AI TOOLS FOR PRIVACY & SECURITY

12 Duck.ai

www.duck.ai

One major concern people have about AI chatbots is that they use your interactions for 'training purposes'. This helps improve their language models, but also means they collect and share information about you, including your location, interests and even your voice (when you use their voice modes). Additionally, they store your chat history, which could be stolen in a data breach.

Most chatbots include privacy settings that let you opt out of data training, and disable and delete your chat history, but to be on the safe side you can use Duck.ai. Now out of beta, this new tool from DuckDuckGo lets you chat anonymously with AI models including OpenAI's GPT-4o mini, Meta's Llama 3.3 and Anthropic's Claude 3 Haiku.

Duck.ai doesn't use your conversations for training purposes and is free to use within (unspecified) daily limits. It doesn't require an account and you can clear your chat history by clicking the flame button top left (1 in our screenshot below). To stop it saving your chats, click the Settings button bottom right 2 and switch off Enable Recent Chats.

Duck.ai lets you talk to AI models privately without collecting your data

Duck.ai is now integrated with DuckDuckGo's search engine and desktop and mobile browsers – open it by clicking or tapping the Chat button in the top-right corner.

DuckDuckGo's search results now include 'AI-assisted' answers, which draw information from a variety of online sources. You can control how frequently these appear (by default it's about 20 per cent of the time) by going to the AI Features section of your Search Settings (www.snipca.com/54089). Click the menu next to Assist and choose Sometimes, Often, On-demand or Never.

Norton Genie uses AI to detect scam emails and text messages

DON'T USE

Secret Llama

www.secretllama.com

Like Duck.ai, Secret Llama lets you chat privately to AI models, without your data ever leaving your computer. In theory, at least. In practice, it just says 'model loading' then displays an error message.

13 Norton Genie

www.snipca.com/54082

Criminals now use AI to create increasingly convincing scams, so Norton Genie fights fire with fire. This superb free AI tool scans dodgy emails, text messages, social-media posts and web pages to detect evidence of scams.

You can use Norton Genie on its website at the link above, and in its apps for Android (www.snipca.com/54083) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54084).

Either copy and paste the text from a message, or the URL of a potential phishing page (taking care not to open any links), or upload a screenshot of the suspect content. Click or tap 'Begin scan' and, after a few seconds of analysis, Norton Genie will give you its verdict (see screenshot above). You can then ask the chatbot for advice on what to do next.

DON'T USE

StopScam

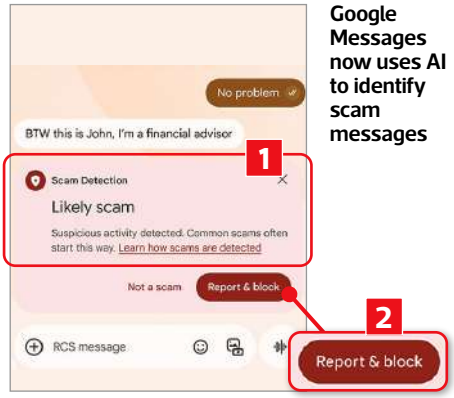
www.stopscam.ai

This AI tool also analyses messages and web pages for scams, and can even check documents you scan with your phone's camera. The catch is that you need to pay £4.99 a month or £29.99 a year for a subscription.

14 Google Scam Detection

www.snipca.com/54102

Google has updated its Messages app for Android (www.snipca.com/54101 – but should be preinstalled on your phone) with an AI feature that protects you from scams in real time. Scam Detection scans SMS, MMS and RCS messages for suspicious patterns and displays a red warning message (1 in our screenshot above), so you can report and block the sender 2.



Google Messages now uses AI to identify scam messages

The new feature has been integrated with the existing Spam Protection option in the Messages app. To turn this on, tap your profile picture and choose 'Messages settings' then 'Spam protection'. Switch on the option 'Enable spam protection'.

On Google Pixel phones, Scam Detection can also analyse phone calls for possible scams, but this feature is currently limited to the US.

DON'T USE

Apple Intelligence Priority Messages

www.snipca.com/54106

Priority Messages is a new AI (Apple Intelligence) feature in Apple Mail that's supposed to summarise important emails in your inbox. But users have reported it prioritising spam and phishing scams (www.snipca.com/54105).

To turn it off, tap the three-dot icon in the Mail app, select List View and disable Show Priority.

BEST AI TOOLS FOR ENHANCING PHOTOS & VIDEOS

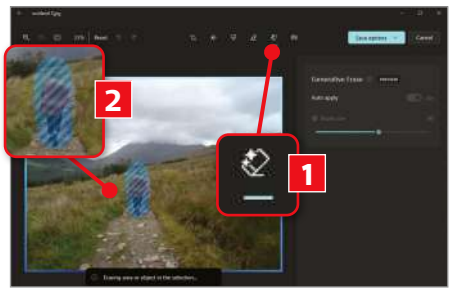
15 Microsoft Photos

www.snipca.com/54114

Microsoft's Photos app for Windows 10 and 11 includes a handy AI feature called Generate Erase, for deleting unwanted objects, people and blemishes from photos. Open a picture in Photos and click the Edit button in the top-left corner. In the row of options above the image, click the Erase button (1 in our screenshot below) to open the Generate Erase tool. Drag the brush over the unwanted element to 'paint' over it – you can adjust the brush size as required.

Generate Erase will now use AI to remove the offending element 2 and seamlessly blend in the surroundings. With more complex deletions – such as people – it can take a few attempts to achieve decent results

Alternatively, use the free online AI tool ObjectRemover (www.snipca.com/54113). This works faster than Generative Erase but limits your photos to 10MB, and sometimes leaves a smudge after removing elements.



The Generate Erase tool in Microsoft Photos removes unwanted elements using AI

DON'T USE

Magic Studio

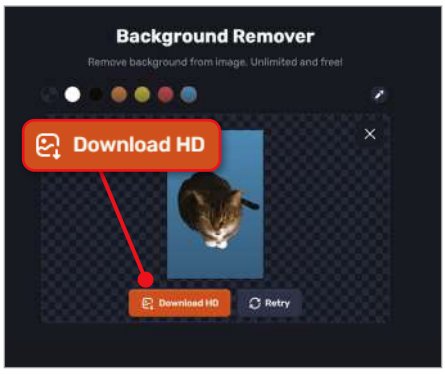
www.snipca.com/54117

Magic Studio's Magic Eraser tool only lets you download low-resolution, watermarked versions of cleaned-up photos. To beat these restrictions, you need to pay £20 a month or £90 a year.

16 Craiyon Background Remover

www.snipca.com/54118

Microsoft Photos also includes an AI option for removing the background from photos. To do the same in your browser, try Craiyon's Background Remover. Unlike rival 'free' tools, it has no daily limits, doesn't impose a watermark or reduce image quality, and



Craiyon's free Background Remover has no annoying restrictions

lets you use it without registering for an account. Just click 'Import an image', upload your photo and Craiyon's AI will identify the subject and neatly remove the background. You can either apply a different colour background, or keep it transparent, before clicking Download HD (see screenshot above).

DON'T USE

Remove.bg

www.remove.bg

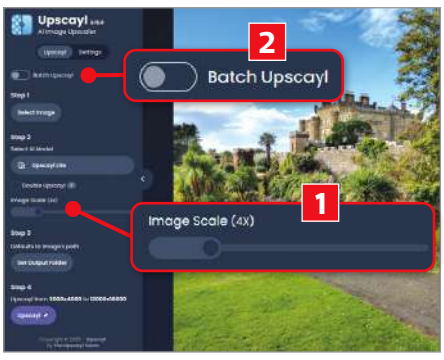
Remove.bg used to be our favourite free tool for removing backgrounds, but now limits you to downloading lo-res previews. For decent-quality results, you need to buy credits, which cost £1.79 per image.

17 Upscayl

www.snipca.com/54120

This simple yet powerful program uses AI to upscale your photos. This increases their resolution and size without affecting their quality, unlike the Resize tool in many standard image editors.

Upscayl offers a choice of AI models and lets you specify the scale of its upscaling to achieve the desired resolution (1 in our screenshot below). It also has a



Make your photos larger and sharper using free AI tool Upscayl

Batch Upscayl option 2 that processes a whole folder of images simultaneously, though this consumes a lot of system resources. The desktop software is free to use, but Upscayl now has a paid-for online version aimed at businesses.

DON'T USE

Remini Web

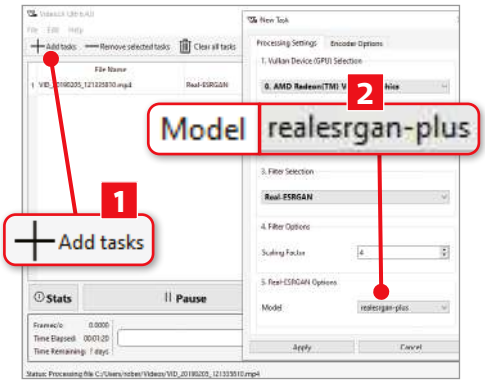
www.snipca.com/54121

Remini Web upscales photos in your browser, with useful options for enhancing faces and backgrounds. But you can't download the results without paying for a subscription, priced from £7 a week for 20 images.

18 Video2x

www.snipca.com/54122

Video2x is one of the only free AI tools for upscaling videos that actually works. Available for Windows and Linux, it uses machine learning to boost video resolution without sacrificing quality.



Video2x upscales low-resolution videos by a factor of four

Click the 'Add tasks' button (1 in our screenshot above) to import a video and choose 'Filter (Upscaling)'. For the best results, select 'realesrgan-plus' 2 as the AI model – this upscales real-life videos (rather than animated clips) by a factor of four. Note that, because of the memory and processing power involved, Video2x can be slow to process videos, especially on older, lower-spec PCs.

DON'T USE

Topaz Video AI

www.snipca.com/54123

Topaz Video AI can make huge improvements to your videos, upscaling them up to 16K resolution. But it has a big price tag to match, costing £299.

BEST AI TOOLS FOR ANALYSING TEXT

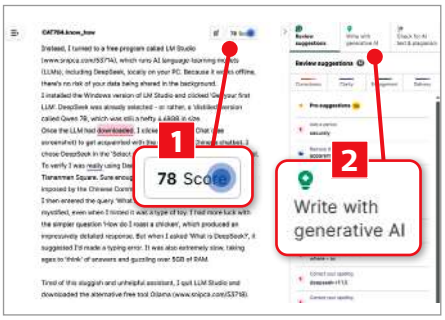
19 Grammarly

www.grammarly.com

Although several features are only available in its Pro version – priced £25 a month, or £10 if you pay annually – Grammarly remains the best free AI tool for improving your writing. It analyses text content in emails, documents, social-media posts and elsewhere to detect spelling and grammatical errors, and tells you how to fix them.

It also gives your writing an overall score (1 in our screenshot below), which increases once you follow its advice. Just make sure to change Grammarly's default language to 'British English' in your account settings.

In addition to its website, Grammarly's browser extensions and apps (www.snipca.com/54125) let you use it for virtually any writing task, and check up to 50,000 words a day – up to a limit of 150,000 a month. You can set your preferred tone and intent (such as Inform, Convince or 'Tell a Story') to tailor its suggestions accordingly, and accept or dismiss each one.



Grammarly uses AI to help you improve your writing style

Grammarly now includes generative AI 2 that rewrites text using prompts – the free plan gives you 100 prompts a day. Its feature for detecting accidental plagiarism and AI-produced content requires a Pro subscription, but you can try all Pro tools for free for seven days.

What's coming next from AI?

Google has several exciting AI tools in the pipeline, including Whisk (already available in the US), which generates pictures from images you provide (www.snipca.com/54129). It will soon launch its impressive-looking video generator VideoFX (www.snipca.com/54130) and expand the AI Overviews in its search results with a new AI Mode (www.snipca.com/54131).

As we reported in Issue 705 (page 8), Amazon has launched Alexa+ – an AI-powered version of its voice assistant – in the US (www.snipca.com/54132), so we can expect it in the UK later this year. Similarly, Apple is giving its Siri assistant an AI upgrade, though this has been delayed (www.snipca.com/54133).

The big new trend in AI is for 'agents', which can perform complex tasks on your behalf. OpenAI has already launched its agent, Operator, in several countries, and other companies are following suit. Opera's browser will soon integrate an AI agent called Browser Operator (www.snipca.com/54134).

DON'T USE

Ginger

www.snipca.com/54126

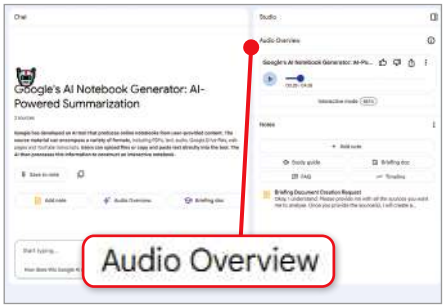
Ginger only lets you check 600 words for free, before you need to buy a Premium subscription, which costs £10 a month or £60 a year. Even that lacks many features offered by Grammarly (though their logos are suspiciously similar).

20 NotebookLM

www.snipca.com/54127

This ingenious new Google tool uses AI to generate an online notebook from content you feed it. This includes PDF, text and audio files you upload; documents and spreadsheets from Google Drive; web pages and YouTube video transcripts; and text you paste from your clipboard.

NotebookLM uses Google's AI chatbot Gemini to analyse and summarise your sources, and make connections between them. You can then ask questions about the content and add your own notes to the notebook. Its cleverest feature is Audio Overview (see screenshot above right), which generates an audio conversation from your notebook, in which very human-sounding male and female voices discuss its content. This is just like listening to a personalised podcast, and you can download and share the result.



Google's NotebookLM compiles multiple sources and creates podcasts from them

The free version of NotebookLM lets you create 100 notebooks – containing up to 50 sources each – and generate three audio overviews per day.

DON'T USE

Note AI

www.snipca.com/54128

This mobile app combines AI-powered note-taking and voice-transcription tools, but you need to pay £9.49 a month to use them. We're also put off by the fact it has three different names (Note AI, Notebook AI and iMemo). ca

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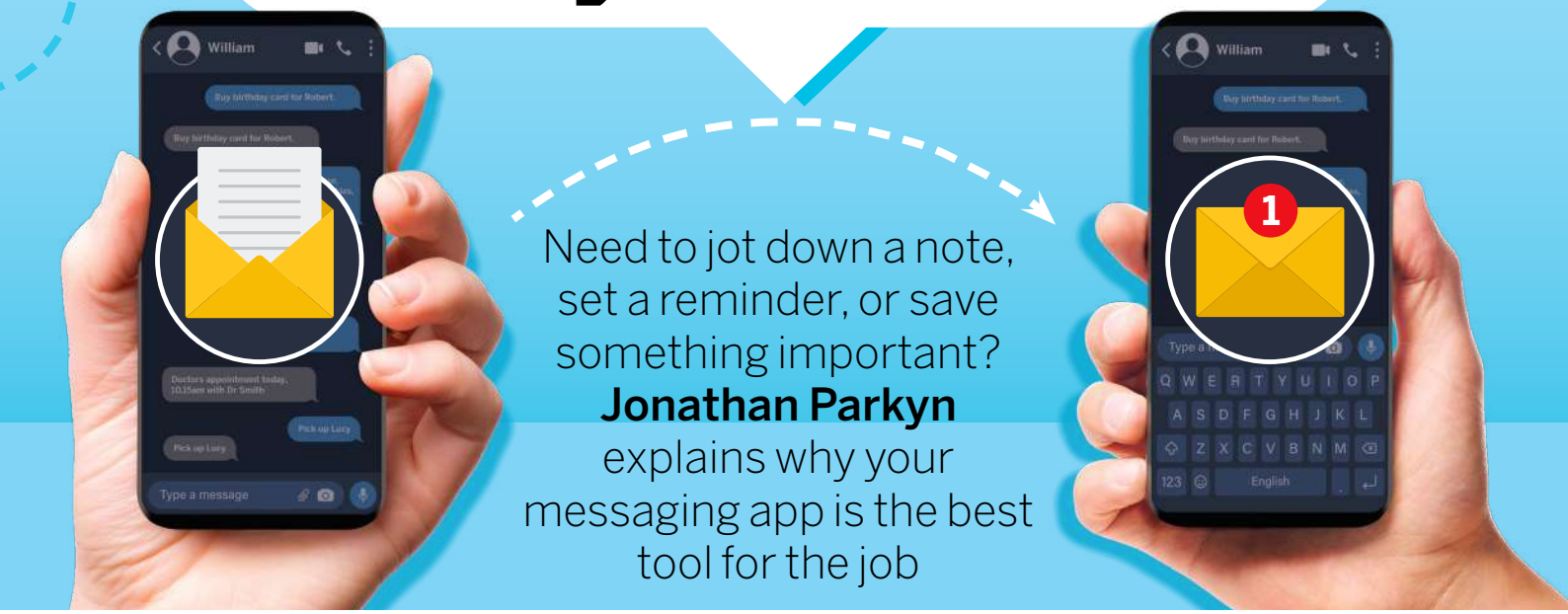
Send messages to yourself



Need to jot down a note, set a reminder, or save something important? **Jonathan Parkyn** explains why your messaging app is the best tool for the job

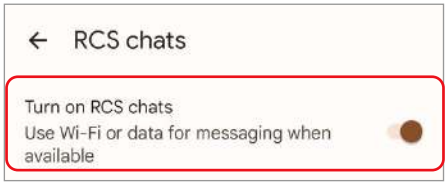
Talking to yourself might seem to be the first sign of madness (it isn't, by the way), but messaging yourself is one of the smartest things you can do. Why? Because it's a fast and simple way to send yourself notes, reminders, links, photos, files and pretty much anything else you want to be able to access later.

Yes, you could use a dedicated note-taking or reminder app. But that would involve finding the app, working out how to use it and setting up a new note or reminder every time. Sending messages, by contrast, is something we all do every day – just tap, type and send.

Messaging apps also make it easy to find what you want when you need it. Conversations are instantly searchable. Your chat history is displayed in chronological order and you get visual previews of links, photos, documents and other attachments you've sent yourself.

Many of the best messaging services work across different platforms, so you can send yourself something on one device and pick it up on another. And, as we demonstrated in Issue 703 (page 62) you can back up and print messages you send yourself.

Messaging tools are cottoning on to the benefits of self-chatting, and many have now added features to make the whole process easier. We'll outline these, and explain how to stay on top of the emails you send yourself.



Turn on RCS chats in Google Messages to send yourself long messages, photos and videos

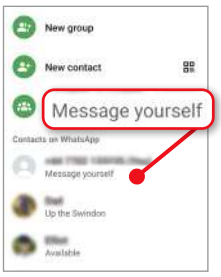
Google Messages

Starting a conversation with yourself in Google Messages for Android phones is straightforward – simply add an entry for yourself in Google Contacts (if you haven't already), including your mobile-phone number, then open Google Messages, tap Start Chat and select your own name from the contacts list. You can see these on your Windows PC by syncing your phone using Microsoft's Phone Link – for instructions visit www.snipca.com/54073 - or by visiting www.snipca.com/54108 in your browser.

Until last month, Google Messages used the older SMS protocol for any messages you sent to yourself, which made it impractical for sending anything other than short text notes. But a new update means that users can now send themselves messages in the RCS (Rich Communication Services) format, which supports longer messages, and lets you send high-quality photos, videos and file attachments.

Google has only just started rolling out this feature, so you may have to wait for the update to arrive. You'll need the latest version of Google Messages installed and then to check whether RCS is activated on your device. Open Google Messages, tap your top-right icon and select 'Messages settings'. Now tap 'RCS chats' and make sure 'Turn on RCS chats' at the top is on (see screenshot left).

It's worth noting that RCS messages sent to your own number aren't currently end-to-end encrypted, making this a less secure option than the others here.



Tap 'Message yourself' in WhatsApp to send yourself links, text, photos and attachments

WhatsApp

This ever-popular messaging app is available for iPhones and Android phones and you can also access your messages from your computer via the desktop app (www.whatsapp.com/download) or by accessing WhatsApp Web via your browser (https://web.whatsapp.com) – though you'll also need your phone nearby to use these. All messages are protected by end-to-end encryption, including those you send to yourself.

WhatsApp introduced self-messaging features a couple of years ago. Tap the square 'New chat' button on the main Chats page and select 'Message yourself' (see screenshot left).

Send yourself voice messages

If you can't spare the time or the fingers needed to type a text message, there's an even quicker and easier way to send yourself a note or reminder – just leave a voice message instead. All the messaging apps here let you do this, but they work in different ways.

Google Messages Tap the soundwave icon in the text-entry box to reveal the microphone button. Tap this, start speaking, then tap the stop button when you're done, then tap Attach and send your message.

WhatsApp Long-press the microphone button and speak your message, then release the button to send your voice memo automatically.

Apple Messages Tap the + button to the left of the text-entry box, then select Audio. Recording will begin automatically, so start speaking and tap Stop, then Send.

Facebook Messenger Tap the microphone icon to the left of the text-entry box, start speaking, then tap the pause button when you've finished, and tap Send.

From here, you can send yourself links, photos, copied text and file attachments, just as you would with any other contact or group. WhatsApp makes it particularly easy to find something specific within a conversation. Tap your name at the top of the screen, then tap 'Media, links and docs' to browse through files and web links you've sent yourself.

You can also forward messages to yourself - long-press one then select Forward. Search for your name in the contacts list, then tap yourself and tap Forward (iOS) or the Send button (Android).

Apple Messages

Apple iPhone users can message themselves using Apple's built-in Messages app. Add an entry for yourself in the Contacts app, then open Apple's Messages app and tap the New Chat button. In the 'To' field, start typing your mobile number, and select your contact from the list. As with WhatsApp, anything you send yourself via Messages is end-to-end encrypted.

Scroll down Apple Messages to see photos, links and documents you've sent yourself

The Messages app uses Apple's own iMessage protocol when sending messages to other iPhone users – including messages sent to yourself. Like RCS, iMessage supports longer text, photos and videos, file attachments and more. Tap your name at the top of the conversation and scroll down to browse photos (1 in our screenshot above), links 2 and documents 3 you've sent yourself.

The Messages app also comes built into iPads and Macs, offering an easy way to share files, links and more between your Apple devices. If you're running iOS 15 or later and have the latest version of Microsoft's Phone Link app on your PC, you can now get very basic iMessage support via Windows, too – launch Phone Link, tap the iPhone option and follow the on-screen steps. However, you can't sync all your messages with your iPhone, nor send/receive files via Apple Messages from your PC, making this feature much less useful than its Android equivalent.

Facebook Messenger

Messenger's best feature is sending messages to yourself from pretty much any device. There are Messenger apps for iOS and Android devices, including for iPads and Android tablets (something that WhatsApp currently lacks). Plus, you can use it on computers by logging in at www.messenger.com. And, although it's now officially a separate entity to Facebook, you can still access your messages via www.facebook.com from your desktop browser, too.

On top of that, Messenger now stores all your conversations with end-to-end encryption, following a big security update last year. Check this is turned on by tapping the three-line menu button in the Messenger app, followed by the Settings cog, then tapping 'Privacy & safety'. Next, tap 'End-to-end encrypted chats' and make sure 'Message storage' is set to On.

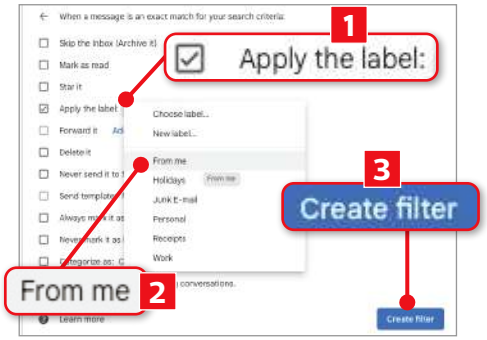
Whichever device you're using, you can start a conversation with yourself by tapping or clicking the 'New message' button – start typing your own name, then tap/click it when it appears. You can also paste text or links, add photos and attach files, though most videos will be too large for its 25MB limit.

Find emails you've sent yourself

You can, of course, send notes, reminders and attachments to yourself by email. The trouble is they can easily get lost among all the other messages in a busy inbox. One solution is to use rules and filters so messages you send yourself are automatically sent to specific folders.

In Gmail, send yourself an email and, when it arrives, right-click it in your Inbox and select 'Label as', then 'Create new'. Type a name for your label – 'From me', for example – then click Create. Now, click the email from yourself, click the three vertical dots in the toolbar above the Inbox, and select 'Filter messages like these'.

In the box that opens you should see your Gmail address in the 'From' field. Leave all the other criteria blank and click 'Create filter'. Now tick the box next to 'Apply the label' (1 in our screenshot below) and select the label you created earlier 2. Click 'Create filter' 3 to confirm. From now on, all emails you send yourself will appear under the label you created.



Create a filter in Gmail so emails you send yourself go to specific folders automatically

You can set up something very similar in Outlook. Click the three horizontal dots and select Rules, 'Manage rules', then 'Add new rule'. Name your rule 'From myself' or something similar. Under 'Add a condition' select 'From', then add your own email address in the box next to this. Under 'Add an action' select 'Move to' (or 'Copy to', if you want to leave a copy of your messages in the Inbox as well). Under 'Select a folder' choose 'Create a new folder', type a name for the folder – 'From me', for example – and click Save, then Save again. ca

Keep your files encrypted

Lots of messaging apps use end-to-end encryption, but online storage services aren't as secure. **Robert Irvine** explains what's changed and how to protect your files

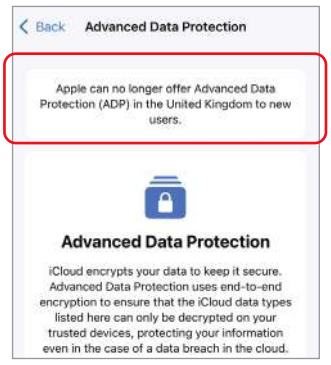
In February, Apple stopped offering its Advanced Data Protection (ADP) feature in the UK. This followed an order by the Government, under the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, for the company to allow it access to users' fully encrypted files.

ADP applies end-to-end encryption to data stored in iCloud, so no one but you can access your files. The Home Office reportedly demanded a 'backdoor' be built into Apple's encryption so law-enforcement agencies could gather data that's otherwise inaccessible to criminal investigations.

Apple said it has "never built a backdoor or master key to any of our products or services and we never will" (www.snipca.com/54156). Rather than compromise its encryption system, it reluctantly decided to withdraw Advanced Data Protection in the UK, though the feature remains available "everywhere else in the world". Apple has begun legal action against the Government to overturn the demand (see page 8).

How does this affect you?

Advanced Data Protection is an opt-in iCloud feature on iPhones and iPads, but in the UK the option is now unavailable to new users (see screenshot above right). If you enabled the feature before 21 February, end-to-end encryption will still work for the time being (Apple can't disable it automatically), but you'll soon need to turn it off to keep using your iCloud account.


Back
Advanced Data Protection
Apple can no longer offer Advanced Data Protection (ADP) in the United Kingdom to new users.
Advanced Data Protection
iCloud encrypts your data to keep it secure. Advanced Data Protection uses end-to-end encryption to ensure that the iCloud data types listed here can only be decrypted on your trusted devices, protecting your information even in the case of a data breach in the cloud.

Advanced Data Protection is no longer available to new Apple iCloud users in the UK

The change doesn't apply to Apple tools that have end-to-end encryption enabled by default, such as iMessage and FaceTime. But it does affect nine iCloud categories, including iCloud Backup, iCloud Drive, Photos, Notes and Safari Bookmarks. Your data will still be encrypted using Standard Data Protection, but this isn't end-to-end, which means it can be intercepted and decrypted by third parties.

Is this a sign of things to come?

Even if you don't use iOS or iCloud, the Government's backdoor demand has worrying ramifications for online privacy. It could next turn its attention to encryption tools owned by companies less powerful than Apple, which are unable to refuse its 'requests', or big tech firms with fewer qualms about complying – it has probably done so already.

In February, 109 civil-society organisations and cybersecurity experts sent a joint letter to Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, warning that an ADP backdoor would set a "dangerous precedent for global cybersecurity" (www.snipca.com/54159). The previous government backed down on plans to make tech companies build backdoor access into encrypted messaging services, as part of the Online Safety Act 2023, but the 'war on encryption' is clearly far from over.

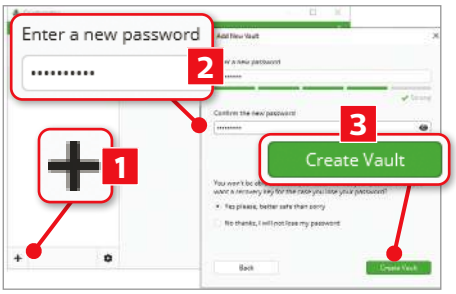
How to keep your files encrypted

Encrypt your files before uploading

Cryptomator (www.snipca.com/54161) provides a simple way to encrypt files yourself before you upload them to online-storage services. It's free to use on Windows and macOS, and works in conjunction with the desktop apps for services including Google Drive, Dropbox, OneDrive and iCloud.

This ensures your data is end-to-end encrypted when the storage provider doesn't offer that protection (or has withdrawn it in the UK). You can download the 'iCloud for Windows' app from www.snipca.com/54162.

To encrypt your files, click the plus-sign button (1 in our screenshot above right) in Cryptomator's bottom-left corner and choose Create New Vault. Type a name for your vault, select 'Custom location' and click Choose.



Cryptomator applies end-to-end encryption to files you save to online storage

Browse to the drive/folder for your online-storage service and click Select Folder.

Next enter a password to encrypt your vault with 2. You should also create a recovery key in case you forget the password – copy this to a text file or print it using the options provided.

Click 'Create Vault' 3 then Unlock Now and enter your password. Choose 'Unlock' followed by Reveal Drive to access your new vault. Any files you copy to the vault's drive in File Explorer will be automatically encrypted and uploaded to its folder in the online-storage service (provided auto-sync is enabled). Click 'Lock' to secure them and hide the drive.

To decrypt items in Cryptomator, click the Unlock button, enter your password and click Reveal Drive. Alternatively, right-click the file 'vault.cryptomator' in the storage folder and select 'Open with Cryptomator'.

Cryptomator's free iOS app (www.snipca.com/54164) lets you unlock your vaults on your iPhone or iPad, but it's read-only. This means you can view files but not add them – unless you pay £19.99 for a lifetime licence. The Android app (www.snipca.com/54165) costs the same price and doesn't have a free version.

Switch to an encrypted storage service

Although Google Drive, OneDrive and Dropbox encrypt your files 'at rest' and in transit, they don't provide end-to-end encryption. This means they're no more secure than iCloud now is at protecting your data from being decrypted by third parties.

The best alternative is Proton Drive (www.snipca.com/54168), which uses end-to-end encryption 'by design', so you don't need to opt in manually. Its desktop app (www.snipca.com/54169) lets you choose folders – such as Documents, Pictures and Videos (see screenshot above right) – to back up automatically and sync your files across devices.

With the Proton Drive app for Android (www.snipca.com/54170) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54171), you can back up encrypted photos and videos from your phone or tablet. Just like Apple's ADP, these are encrypted on your device before they're uploaded, so only you can open them. To activate this feature, press the Photos tab in the app and select 'Turn on backup'.

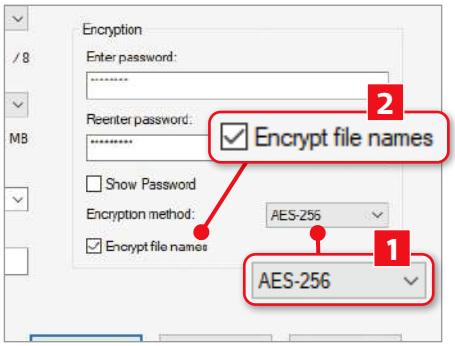
Proton Drive also lets you share files securely by protecting them with a password and setting them to expire on a specific date. Even files other Proton users share with you are covered by its end-to-end encryption.

Although you only get 2GB of free online storage, you can upgrade this to 5GB by uploading and sharing a file, and setting up a recovery method, within 30 days of signing up. Proton Drive's Plus plan, which offers 200GB of storage, costs from £3.29 a month.

Save files in encrypted archives

Encryption software such as VeraCrypt (www.snipca.com/54174) can be fiddly to use and creates an encrypted virtual drive on your PC, rather than encrypting individual files. A more flexible solution is to use the free compression tool 7-Zip (www.snipca.com/54175) to save your private files and folders to encrypted archives before uploading to online storage. This ensures only you can decrypt them when you download them.

To encrypt selected files and folders in 7-Zip, click the Add button on the toolbar, enter a name for the archive and choose 7z as the archive format. In the Encryption section, type a password to protect the archive with, ensure the encryption method is AES-256 (1 in our screenshot below) and select 'Encrypt file names' 2.



Save private files and folders in encrypted archives using 7-Zip

Click 'OK' to create the compressed and encrypted archive, then save it to online storage or elsewhere on your PC. Nobody can extract the contents of the archive without entering your password.

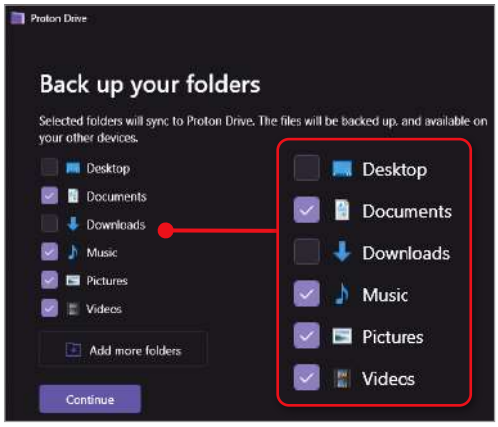
Alternatively, the free online tool Hat.sh (www.snipca.com/54177) lets you encrypt and decrypt files directly in your browser, without needing to compress them. Enter a password to protect the item with, then download the result in ENC format. The encryption is performed locally, so no data is shared with Hat.sh. ca

Does Android have end-to-end encryption?

Following Apple's withdrawal of Advanced Data Protection, Google responded to a post on X (formerly Twitter) asking whether it allows the UK Government to access Android devices. It said: "Android backups are encrypted and no one can access them except you" (www.snipca.com/54178).

But before you ditch your iPhone or iPad, note that this refers specifically to system backups, which are encrypted and decrypted using private keys on your device. These are linked to your passcode or biometric authentication method, so only you – and not Google or the Government – can access your data.

However, content in Drive, Photos, Gmail and other Google apps is *not* end-to-end encrypted, which means it's not completely safe from prying eyes. The only exception is the Messages app, which provides end-to-end encryption in RCS chats – though only if both you and the recipient have RCS enabled.



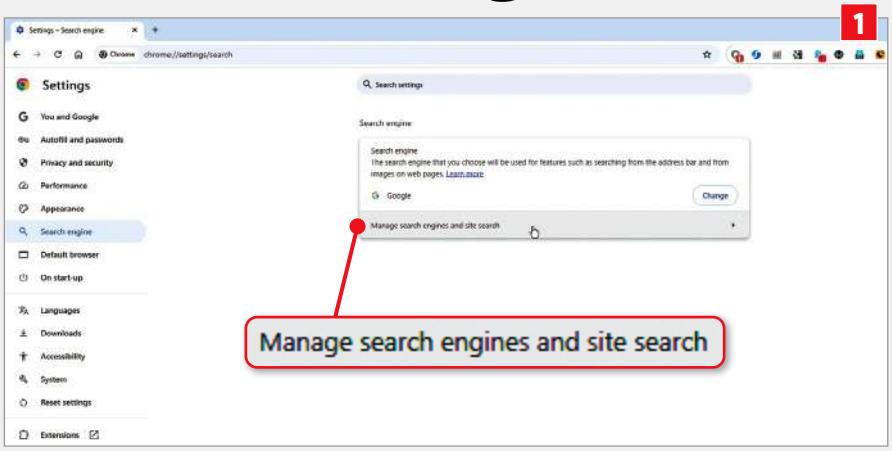
Back up files and folders with end-to-end encryption using Proton Drive

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Why can't I add a search engine to Chrome?



Clicking this option in Chrome offers no easy way to add a new search engine

Q I read your reply to Ronald Hayes about disabling the search bar in Edge (Issue 703, page 65). I followed the instructions and it worked perfectly. However, my main browser is Chrome, so I'd like to apply the same trick there. My problem is that I can't find a way to add a new search engine in Settings. This was the key part of your solution to Ronald's problem. I tried editing the existing Yahoo search engine because I never use it, but I couldn't amend the URL part. Am I missing something?

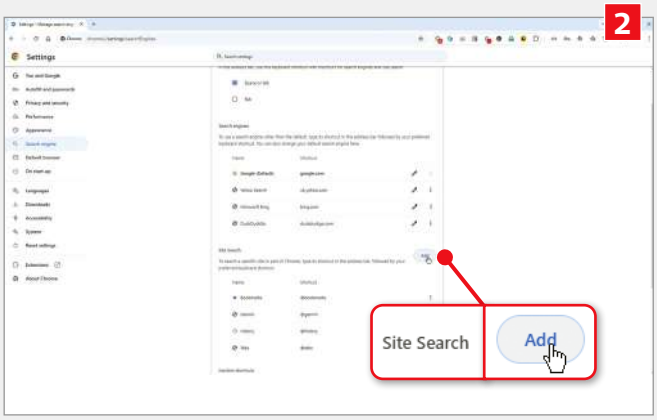
Andy Price

A No, you're not missing anything, but Chrome certainly is. Specifically, it lacks the Add button that Edge provides in this part of Settings. This button used to be available in Chrome too, which is no surprise because both Chrome and Edge are based on the same underlying Chromium code. However, Google has since removed it.

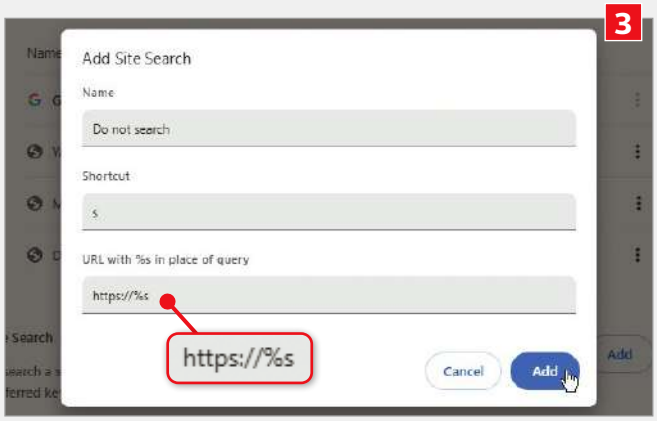
Thankfully, there's a workaround that lets you achieve what you want. First, open the Chrome menu (three dots, top right) and select Settings. Next, on the left, click to select the 'Search engine' tab then, in the right-hand pane, click 'Manage search engines and site search' (see screenshot 1). This is where we see the problem, because the 'Search engines' section offers no obvious way to add a new search engine. Indeed, if you were to delete one of the existing search engines by clicking the three dots to its right followed by Delete, you'd find there's no easy way to get it back again.

Until Google addresses this apparent anomaly, we can apply our own fix here. We'll ignore the 'Search engines' section and instead click the Add button under the Site Search heading 2. If you wanted to add a search engine, you could type its details into the Add Site Search box that appears. However, you want to disable search in Chrome. To do this, give the new entry a name (such as 'Do not search'). You don't actually need a shortcut, but the box requires you to type something into the Shortcut box, so just type any letter you don't already use. Then, in the box labelled 'URL with %s in place of query', type https://%s 3 before clicking Add. This is also where you would add a new search engine.

Finally, under Site Search, click the three dots next to the new 'Do not search' entry, then click 'Make default'. Your new entry will now move up to the 'Search engines' list and appear as the default. You can change this at any time by clicking the three dots next to a different search engine and choosing 'Make default'.



Click the Add button under Site Search to add a new search engine

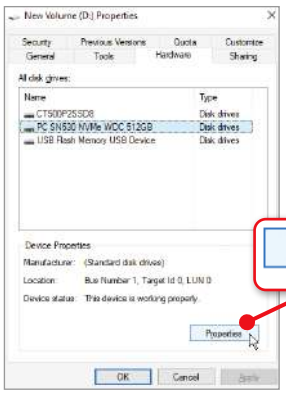


Type https://%s into this box to disable Chrome's search function

Why can't I safely eject my Samsung SSD?

Q I have a problem that's plagued me for years. I use EaseUS Todo Backup (www.snipca.com/53902) to back up my PC to a Samsung Evo USB SSD. Once I've closed EaseUS, I expect to be able to eject the SSD safely, but this never works. Instead Windows says it can't stop the 'SCSI Disk Device'. It tells me to close any programs that might be using the device and try again. But I've already quit EaseUS, and I can't think of any other apps that would be using it. Restarting fixes the problem. Any idea what's causing this?

Dave Symes



Dig down into your hard drive's properties until you find an option to disable its cache

A The hard drive you're using is actually designed for internal use, and has a SATA interface to connect to the PC, but we assume you're using it externally in a caddy or using a USB adapter cable. The message you received from Windows supports this theory because drives that attach to a PC this way often rely on what's known as the USB Attached SCSI Protocol (UASP).

This is relevant because SATA SSDs have their own controllers and cache memory that don't necessarily work in the same way as, say, a USB stick's, because they don't usually have to deal with being 'ejected'.

As such, the drive is probably set to clear its cache only when its own controller says so, such as when Windows shuts down. The eject feature fails because, in effect, the controller tells Windows the drive is still busy. It may not be but it's simply maintaining control.

So, we think that's the cause. If you really need to detach the drive before shutting down Windows, the best fix is to disable its caching tool. This will slow its operation slightly, but you probably won't notice for tasks such as backups, which tend to run in the background.

To disable the cache, first press Windows key+E to open File Explorer, then right-click the drive and choose Properties. Next, in the Properties box, select the Hardware tab, then click the Properties button (see screenshot above left). Open the General tab and click the 'Change settings' button, then select Policies.

What you see here will depend on your specific version of Windows and drive type but, for example, you may need to deselect the option to 'Enable write caching on this device', or click to select the 'Quick removal' option. Choose the appropriate option then click OK.

How do I connect my mini PC to my monitor?

Q It seems most mini PCs connect to a monitor using HMID instead of the normal monitor cable. My monitor doesn't have HMID, so is there another cable I can use?

Roy Bottomley

An active HDMI-to-VGA adapter like Benfei's lets you use an old VGA monitor with a mini PC

Plug the adapter into your PC's HDMI port, then use a VGA cable to connect the monitor

A First, let's clear up a bit of confusion. The correct abbreviation is HDMI, which stands for High-Definition Multimedia Interface, not HMID. That aside, HDMI has actually been around for more than 20 years and many people would consider it the 'normal' cable, or at least one of a few cables they'd expect to use to connect a PC to a monitor.

Our guess is your monitor is probably quite old and uses a 15-pin, D-shaped VGA interface to connect to a PC. The alternative is that it's a high-end professional screen that supports only the newer DisplayPort standard, but that's unlikely because almost all monitors with DisplayPort also have an HDMI socket.

With that in mind, you'll need to buy an active HDMI-to-VGA adapter, like the Benfei model pictured 1 (£6 from www.snipca.com/53871). The 'active' part is important, because it refers to a chip in the adapter that converts the digital HDMI signal into the analogue source your VGA monitor requires. In other words, don't be tempted to buy a cheaper *passive* adapter because that won't do what you need.

Once you've plugged the adapter into your PC's HDMI port, simply connect a standard VGA cable between the adapter and your monitor 2 and you should be good to go.

How do I switch on a mini PC that's mounted to the back of my monitor?

Q If I were to buy one of these mini PCs you often review and attach it to the back of my monitor using a mount, how would I switch it on? Do I stand up, lean over my desk and then fumble around behind the monitor until I find the button? Or is there some other way?

Edward Baines

A It's a fair question, and most manufacturers would probably reply by saying you don't really need to switch off a mini PC or any other modern computer for that matter. Instead you can use Windows 11's Sleep mode to put the device into a state where it barely consumes any power, then wake it simply by tapping the keyboard or wiggling your mouse.

Otherwise you're correct to say you'd need to reach around the back of the monitor to find the power button. Some mounts, such as the pictured Allcam model (around £11 from www.snipca.com/53773), can elevate the mini PC above the top edge of the monitor just a little. This makes it easier to access, though it doesn't look particularly neat.

This Allcam mount can elevate an attached mini PC for easier access

Can I connect my old Bose PC speakers to a new TV set?

Q I have some Bose speakers that are really meant for use with a computer, but I connect them to our LG TV through the set's 3.5mm headphone socket. I've had them for years, and the sound quality is still fantastic. We're thinking of getting a newer TV, but few models seem to have a 3.5mm headphone jack. Is there an alternative way to connect these speakers to a TV? We'd like to keep our excellent Bose speakers busy for a few more years yet.

Paul Jones

A Yes, this should be possible, but the specifics depend on which TV you buy, and what other connectivity options it has.

If your new TV has RCA (phono) outputs – as many sets still do – you can use a simple photo-to-3.5mm adapter, like the Ugreen cable (£9 from www.snipca.com/53774, pictured above right). Just connect the two phono plugs to the corresponding coloured sockets on your TV, then use the TV's menu to direct audio to RCA and you should be able to plug in your speakers to hear the results.

This Ugreen cable can convert RCA phono ports into a 3.5mm headphone socket

Alternatively, you could use a digital-to-audio converter (DAC), such as the Prozor model (£19 from www.snipca.com/53775, pictured below) to turn the audio from the optical socket (sometimes labelled Toslink) into an analogue signal. Again, you simply plug your speakers into the box's 3.5mm socket, then use the TV's menu system to ensure the audio is piped through its optical socket.

Use a digital-to-audio converter (DAC) such as this Prozor model to turn a TV's optical output into an audio signal

Q: How do I securely wipe my old hard drives?

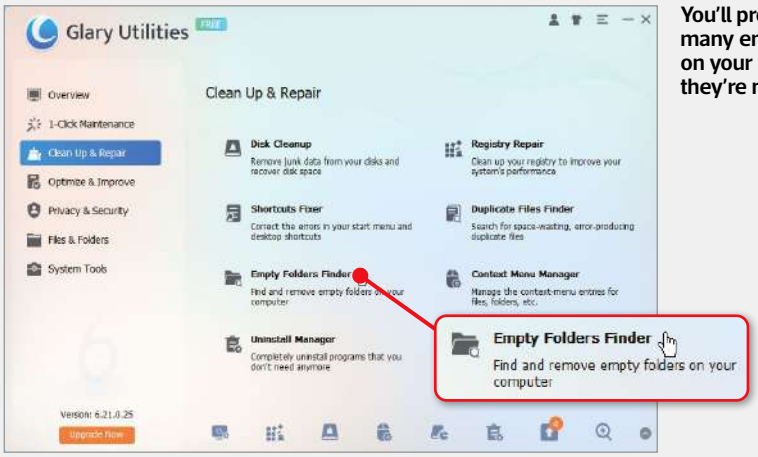
A: Issue 682, page 67 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

Should I delete empty folders from my laptop?

Q I'm a regular reader and often use Glary Utilities (www.glarysoft.com) to remove unwanted files from my laptop. Recently, I tried out its Empty Folders Finder tool in the 'Clean Up & Repair' tab (see screenshot), which presented me with a long list of empty folders. I checked through some of these and found that most were associated with Windows and its related apps. What are they for? And why aren't they being removed from my computer? Can I delete them without affecting Windows?

Christopher Emary



You'll probably find many empty folders on your PC, but they're not a problem

A When using a program like Glary Utilities, it can be tempting to get rid of everything its various tools identify. However, a good rule of thumb is that if you're not sure what something is, leave it alone or do some research before making a decision.

That's certainly true for these empty folders, which probably number in the tens or hundreds, because Windows and the programs you run on it create and delete new files and folders all the time. The empty folders might be left over from software installations or updates, say, or used as temporary storage locations. Deleting an empty folder won't necessarily break anything, but it might.

Besides, Windows and your programs will simply recreate many of these folders when they need them. When we ran the Empty Folders Finder tool on one of our test PCs, for example, it found more than a hundred empty folders. We deleted them all, then restarted Windows, and around half those folders reappeared – still empty.

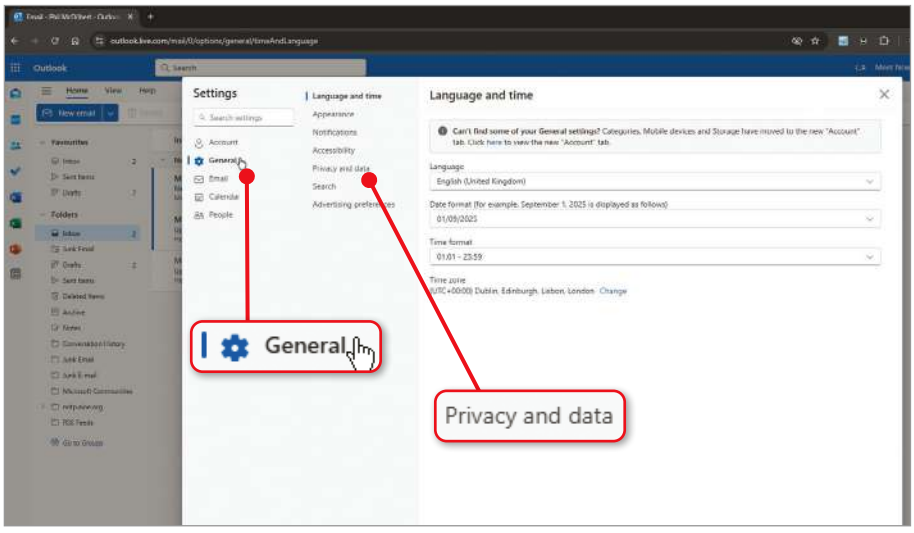
So, yes, you could delete them, and doing so won't necessarily cause problems. On the other hand, empty folders take up close to zero space on your hard drive, but deleting them might just create a problem, so we think it's probably not worth it.

How do I save my old emails to my PC's hard drive?

Q I've been a *Computeractive* reader for several years and really enjoy your informative articles. I have an @btconnect.com email address that I acquired many years ago when I worked for BT. Until last year I could access this using the Outlook app for Windows, but I was informed that I'd have to use the webmail portal at Outlook.com instead. Now, I'm told that because this email address is no longer attached to a BT account, it'll soon cease to exist.

So, I need a way to copy emails from this account to my hard drive. There are simply too many to send individually to another account. I hope you can help.

Jeff Snape



Open Settings, click General then 'Privacy and data' to find Outlook's 'Export mailbox' option

A You can export an Outlook.com mailbox to a standard Microsoft Personal Storage Table (PST) file, which to varying degrees is compatible with recent desktop versions of Outlook. This includes classic Outlook (with Microsoft 365), the new Outlook (with Windows 10 and 11) and Outlook 2024.

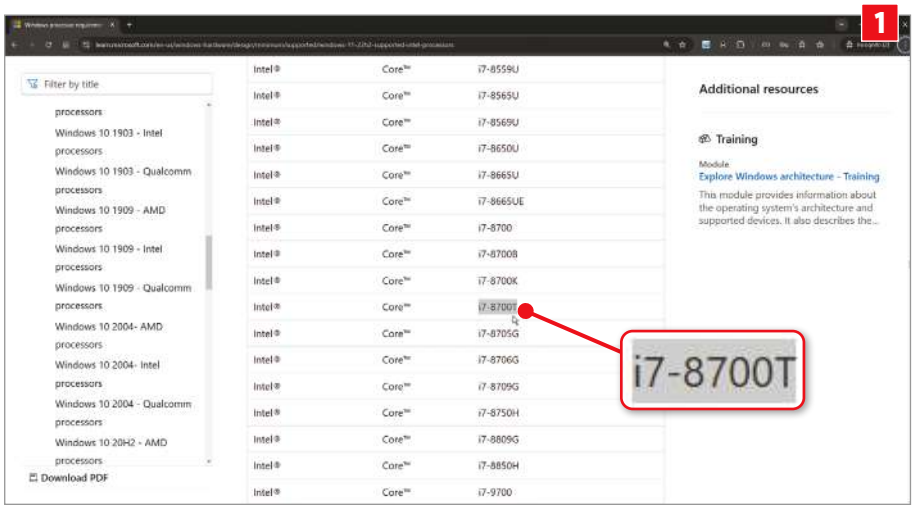
To do this in Outlook.com, first click the Settings cog. Next, in the left-hand pane, click General followed by 'Privacy and data' (see screenshot) then, in the right-hand pane, click 'Export mailbox'.

Once you've done that, you'll have to wait for Microsoft's servers to schedule your request, which can take up to four days. Eventually, you'll see a 'Download here' link next to the 'Export mailbox' button. Click this to download your PST file.

Why isn't Windows 11 compatible with my supported processor?

Q My PC runs Windows 10 Home. Microsoft says support is ending, so I ran the Windows 11 compatibility check in the Microsoft PC Health Check app (www.snipca.com/53777). This tells me my PC's Intel Core i7-7700T processor is not compatible. However, it's on the list of Windows 11-compatible processors at www.snipca.com/53778. Microsoft Support told me only Intel i8 and above chips are supported, and couldn't explain why its own website said i5 and i7 processors were also compatible. Can you help?

Brian Maloney


1
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Windows 10 1903 - Intel processors
Windows 10 1903 - Qualcomm processors
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Explore Windows architecture - Training
This module provides information about the operating system's architecture and supported devices. It also describes the...
i7-8700T

Only eighth-generation Intel processors (such as the i7-8700T) and above can run Windows 11

A Microsoft either failed to understand your problem or failed to explain why your processor isn't compatible. There is no 'Intel i8' processor. There are only processors branded Core i3, i5, i7 and i9. However, each of those processor families has been through multiple 'generations', and only the eighth generation and above are compatible. A processor's generation is indicated by the first number after the 'Core iX' part. So, your Core i7-7700T is a seventh-generation chip, released in 2017. The Core i7-8700T, released the following year, is on Microsoft's list and is supported (see screenshot 1).

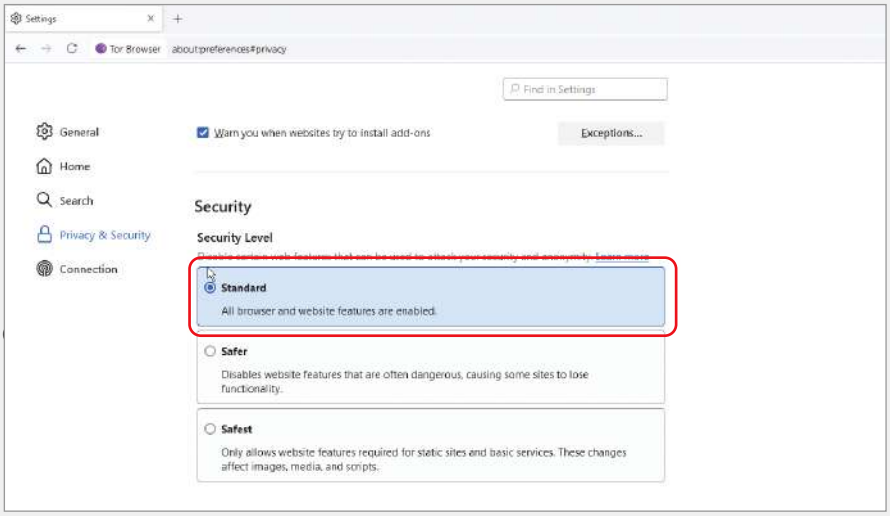
Check Microsoft's support pages for information on extending support for Windows 10

It's possible to force Windows 11 to install on PCs that have unsupported processors. We explained how to do this using Flyby11 in Issue 703's Cover Feature 'Break Windows' worst rules' – buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/53843. Later this year, Microsoft will give Windows 10 users the option to pay US$30 for an extra year of updates, so keep an eye on its support page at www.snipca.com/53776 2.

Which Tor security level should I choose?

Q A 'Security Level' section in Tor's settings includes options for Standard, Safer and Safest. Does this mean you're safe from the prowling authorities or does it protect my details from the dark web?

Elwyn Jones



Tor's Standard mode makes it work like all the other popular browsers

A These levels determine the 'experience' you have in the browser, as well as how safe your PC will be. Standard allows all the everyday stuff to run, so that Tor feels like any other browser. The Safer and Safest options progressively block and disable online elements to maximise your protection against potential threats. This is a good thing, but you'll find that some websites don't work very well.

In short, it's a trade-off between functionality and vulnerability. Tor is very safe even in Standard mode (see screenshot), so for everyday use we'd leave it at that. However, if you're tempted to explore the dark web, it wouldn't hurt to turn up Tor's Security Level a notch or two.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

M.2 and MVMe?

Q I'm not exactly a computer novice, having owned a PC in one form or another for over 30 years, but I'm very far from being an expert – especially when it comes to some of the modern terminology. That doesn't cause me too many problems because I just like to use my laptop. But as my SSD is nearly full I thought I'd look about the possibility of adding a new one. My laptop specifications state that it has a spare M.2 slot, but when I went to look for a drive that might fit I quickly became confused. There seems to be different sizes, and other terms like NVMe, that I need to know about. Can you explain the differences – hopefully in simple terms.

Arnold Craddock

Laptops can use both SATA (right) and NVMe (below) SSDs, but the latter are newer and faster – though more expensive

A The technology industry delights in sprinkling almost everything with copious amounts of jargon – but we'll try to explain as simply as we can.

We don't know which specific laptop model you have but, as you've already learned, not all M.2 drives are the same. First thing to know is size. M.2 SSDs come in different physical sizes, measured in millimetres by width and length. The most common size is 2280 (so, 22x80mm). Many laptops support this, but do check, because some slots have room only for a 2230 SSD.

Next, the interface or protocol. This defines the way the M.2 slot (and drive) 'talk' to your PC. You don't need to worry too much about the technicalities, but there's SATA and NVMe. The latter is newer and much faster (and therefore more expensive). Your M.2 slot might support only one standard or other, though some laptops have dual-mode slots that can support either. Many if not most new laptops with an M.2 slot should support the latest NVMe protocol.

If you can afford NVMe, that'd be the better choice. However, don't worry if technical or budget limitations mean you need to buy SATA – because a SATA M.2 SSD will still be completely fine for everyday use.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Why won't my tablet connect to hotel's Wi-Fi?

Q I have a Moto G82 5G phone, which works on Android 13. I use it to connect to hotel Wi-Fi systems when I'm away. Generally, the connection is quick and efficient.

I also have a Samsung Galaxy Tab S6 Lite tablet, which also works on Android 13. Can you explain why – with exactly the same version of Android 13 and in the same location – the tablet will sometimes fail to connect to a hotel's Wi-Fi, or if it does then drops out, making it pretty difficult to do anything online. On exactly the same network, the Moto always seems to handle everything fine. Am I doing anything wrong?

Bob Evans

A It's very unlikely you're doing anything wrong. However, similarities between any two Android devices are usually only skin deep – and especially so between devices from different manufacturers and with different forms.

Reset your tablet's connectivity options by tapping this option in its Settings

Both your phone and tablet run Android 13, which makes the experience feel alike. But beyond this the specifications and components are very different. For example, it's possible that the phone's Wi-Fi antenna is simply better designed and positioned than the one in the tablet.

That said, we aren't aware of any specific flaws with your tablet model's Wi-Fi component, so we'd suggest resetting its connectivity options. You'll need to reconnect to any favourite Wi-Fi networks and Bluetooth devices, which is a bit of a hassle, but this is a good way of fixing any software quirks that might be causing this problem. To do this, first open the Settings app, then tap System followed by 'Reset options'. Next, tap 'Reset Wi-Fi, mobile & Bluetooth' (see screenshot) and then confirm by tapping 'Reset settings'.

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 9 Apr

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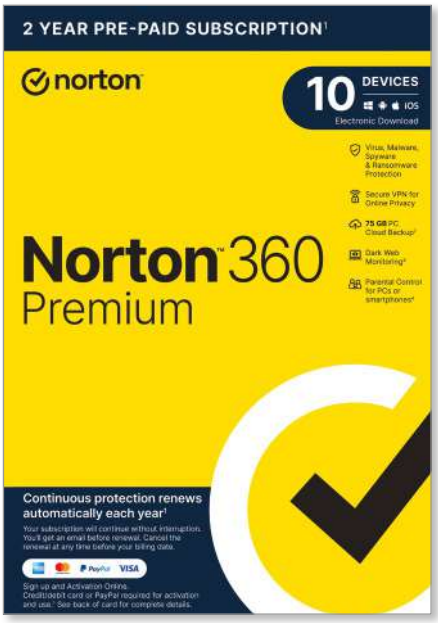

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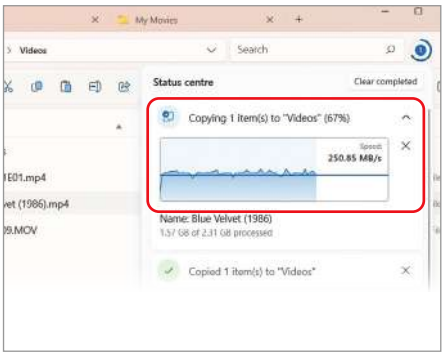
Can I monitor progress and transfer speed in Files?

Q You've often promoted the Files app (https://files.community) as a worthy replacement for File Explorer. I've given it a try and like it. However, there's one feature in File Explorer that I can't find in Files. I cut and paste large quantities of data between drives and have been accustomed to monitoring progress and speed of transfer in File Explorer. Is this tool hidden somewhere in Files?

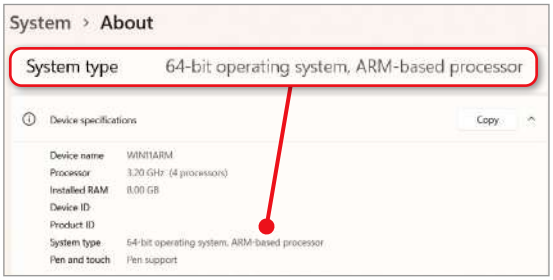
Chris Fewtrell

A Yes, the Files app can do this – though the progress-monitoring window doesn't pop up automatically, as it does in File Explorer. Instead, you need to click a button to open the Status Centre window. This button remains hidden unless you're carrying out an activity, such as transferring a file, at which point it will appear just to the right of the Search bar at the top right. While a file transfer is in progress, it will show up as a blue button with a number on it to represent how many file transfers are taking place.

Clicking the button opens the Status Centre, showing recent file activities. Clicking the down arrow next to the current activity reveals more detail, including a very similar transfer-speed chart to the one in File Explorer (see screenshot below).



The Files app has a similar transfer-speed chart to the one in File Explorer



Click Start, Settings, System, then About and look under 'System type' to see which type of processor you have

Which Hasleo download link should I click?

Q The download link you gave for Hasleo Backup Suite (www.snipca.com/53669) shows two options – 'X86/X64 v5.0 Release 3' and 'ARM64 v5.0'. I've no idea which one is correct for my computer, which runs Windows 11 23H2. Can you help?

Roy Gillott

A The version you need depends on your processor type, rather than your Windows version. In most cases, the X86/X64 version will be the one to download. But to check, click Start, Settings, System, About and look under 'System type'. If it says 'ARM-based processor' (see screenshot above), you'll need to download the ARM64 version of Hasleo Backup Suite instead.

Should you cancel two-factor codes before getting a new phone?

Q Thanks for your article on wiping data from your old phones (Issue 702, page 60). Probably the most frequent need for erasing data is after upgrading to a newer model. Apple iOS lets you transfer data to a new phone, but this doesn't copy two-factor authentication (2FA) codes. I imagine there are technical reasons, but iOS doesn't warn you. After six months I'm still trying to recover some logins. Is it necessary to cancel all 2FA setups before moving to a new phone?

Tim Boddington

A Are you referring to the type of 2FA where you use an authenticator app on your phone? If so, there are ways to transfer your accounts to a new phone. With Microsoft Authenticator, for example, open the app on your old phone, tap the three horizontal-lines button, select Settings, then make sure that iCloud/Cloud Backup is activated.

Then, on your new phone, open Authenticator, select 'Restore from backup' and sign in with your Microsoft account when prompted. You won't need to wipe any 2FA codes from your old phone – just reset it, as we described in Issue 702.

If you're talking about 'standard' 2FA – where you may be sent a code by text to authenticate your identity – this wouldn't be affected by upgrading to a new phone. These codes are only designed to be used once, and nothing is permanently stored on the old phone. You'll simply continue to receive 2FA codes on your new phone, as long as you've kept the same mobile number.

This would only be a problem if you also changed your mobile number. In this case, you may indeed struggle to access 2FA-protected accounts that don't provide a secondary way of authenticating your identity (via email or backup codes, for example). Not only that, but it's also a massive security risk, as your old phone number may be recycled, meaning that a complete stranger could end up receiving 2FA codes for your private accounts.

This is one of the main reasons we always advise holding on to your mobile number, wherever possible (see Issue 696, page 60). If you have no option other than to change your phone number, then you should temporarily disable 2FA on all your accounts before re-enabling it with your new number.

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

16K Screen resolution of 16,384 pixels horizontally, offering extremely high clarity.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

AES-256bit Advanced Encryption Standard. A form of encryption based on a key length of 256 bits. Cracking it would take longer than the age of the universe.

Antivirus engine The core component of an antivirus program that detects malware.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen. Traditional PC screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Biometric Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Blue light Light given off by PC and phone screens. Can disrupt sleep patterns.

Brute-force attack A method of breaking encryption by simply guessing all possible passwords until the right one is found.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

Caddy A box into which you can fit a hard disk, converting it into an external drive.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users, especially over the internet.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Contrast ratio A measure of the difference between the darkest and lightest possible shades shown by a screen.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website. Used to store browsing preferences, website log-in details and so on.

Copilot+ An enhanced version of Microsoft's Copilot AI tool. Also used to classify Windows 11 computers with a neural processing unit (NPU) that can perform over 40 trillion operations per second (TOPS).

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a computer processor.

Crowdfunding A process where a company gets the financing to launch a new product from prospective customers online.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

CSV Comma Separated Value. A standard file format, used for storing information in tables.

Dark web Websites that can only be accessed using special software such as the Tor Browser.

Deepfake A video that superimposes a fake voice over a clip of someone talking, a fake face on someone's body, or makes a static photo move.

DHCP Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol. A system where one device on a network, normally the router, distributes network addresses to the others on request.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Emulator A program that makes one computer act like another, allowing it to run that computer's software.

End-to-end encryption A way of encrypting messages so that the only people who can read them are the sender and recipient.

Freemium A business model, especially on the internet, where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

GPU Graphics Processor Unit. A chip designed to create 3D graphics, but which can also be used for other computing tasks.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HTTPS Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure. The secure version of HTTP, the technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

JavaScript An older programming language developers use to make web pages interactive.

Layers Image-editing programs let users create multiple layers, which can be drawn on, re-ordered or hidden.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

MAC address Media Access Control. A unique code that identifies any router.

Machine learning The science of teaching computers how to learn by themselves, without further human input.

Manifest V2 Second version of the software that runs Chrome browser extensions.

Mask In an image-editing program a mask is used to block off an area of the image, making it immune to changes.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

MMS Multimedia Messaging. A system for sending images and sounds between mobile phones without using email.

MP4 A type of digital movie file often used for portable players.

Noise cancellation Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound specifically designed to cancel the first.

OCR Optical character recognition. The process by which printed text is scanned and converted into documents that can be edited.

OGG A free alternative to the MP3 standard for compressing digital audio.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Picture-in-picture Shows video in a small moveable screen while you browse the web or watch TV.

Plain text Text in a document that doesn't contain any formatting, such as bold characters, underlines and italics.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Product key A unique serial number issued by software companies that must be typed in by the user before a program will launch for the first time.

Progressive web app A website that looks and works like an app, which you can install on computers, phones and tablets.

PSU Power supply unit. The box that supplies power to the rest of your computer.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

RAR Roshal Archive. A format for storing compressed files.

RCS Rich Communication Services. A method of sending text messages over phones with more features than SMS.

Read speed How long it takes a hard drive to 'read' data, and respond to it.

SATA Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives and optical discs to a computer.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

SEO Search engine optimisation. Improving where your site appears in search results.

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

SLC Single layer cell. Fast flash memory, but expensive to make.

SMS Short Message Service. More commonly called text messaging.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

SSE4.2 Technology in Intel processors that speeds up tasks like handling text, security and media.

TOPS Trillion operations per second. A measure of a PC's processing power when performing AI tasks.

Tor Browser A web browser designed for anonymous surfing.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

Ultra HD Ultra high definition. Resolution of 3840x2160.

Upscale Creating a larger version of a photo without sacrificing clarity and detail.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2 Faster successors to USB.

USB-A The original type of USB connector, released in 1996.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible.

VESA Video Electronics Standards Association. A standard mount for attaching monitors on to stands, walls and PCs.

VGA Video Graphics Array. An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a PC.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAN Wide Area Network. Exists over a large geographical area.

WAV file An audio file, used for recording music to disc.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called 802.11ax.

Write speed How long it takes a hard drive to save data.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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3	sky	Full Fibre 150	**£27.00** Prices locked until April 2027	24 Months	**150Mbps** avg. speed	**£40** Gift Card	**£284**
4	Virgin media	M250 Fibre Broadband	**£30.50** £34 from April 2026 bill	18 Months	**264Mbps** avg. speed	**£75** Bill Credit	**£291**

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Know How

Intrigued by Microsoft's controversial new AI tool for Copilot+ PCs, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Use Windows Recall privately

Microsoft has made many blunders over the years, which inevitably attract more attention than mistakes by smaller tech companies. These range from poorly designed operating systems such as Windows 8 to unpopular devices like its Zune portable media player.

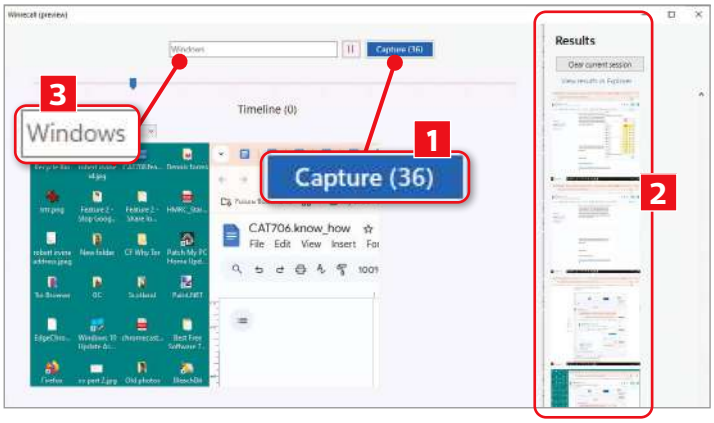
> Windows Recall sounds like the definition of a privacy nightmare

The latest example of Microsoft's apparent folly is Recall, the AI feature it announced last year to an immediate and widespread backlash. Designed for new Copilot+ PCs, Recall takes snapshots of everything you see and do on your computer, then analyses the content using AI, so you can easily search for it later.

Recall sounds like the definition of a privacy nightmare, especially when it was rumoured that details of users' activities would be shared with Microsoft. The company later clarified this wouldn't be the case and that the feature would be disabled by default, but by then the damage was done and Recall was being flagged as a reason *not* to buy a Copilot+ PC.

However, the concept behind Recall isn't without merit. Our PCs already save details of our activities – including files we open and websites we visit – so why not extend that to cover all tasks and make the content searchable? The answer of course is that nobody wants to be spied on, whether by Microsoft or AI.

So I was intrigued to discover a new open-source tool called Winrecall (www.snipca.com/54038), which claims to replicate some of Recall's functionality. The differences being that it doesn't require a Copilot+ PC, has nothing to do with Microsoft and is able to work offline using AI and OCR.



Winrecall captured snapshots of Robert's screen too frequently for his liking

I downloaded Winrecall from www.snipca.com/54039 and extracted the contents of its ZIP file (find it under the Assets heading). I then double-clicked its installer and chose 'More info' then 'Run anyway' at the expected SmartScreen warning.

When the program opened, it prompted me to set an encryption key to protect my data. It also asked me to choose a Capture Mode – 'AI + OCR<' to combine screenshot descriptions with text extraction; or 'OCR Only'. Keen to see if and how the AI worked, I chose the former.

In the main Winrecall window, I clicked Capture to start recording snapshots of my activities. There was no setting to specify the frequency of screen captures, but I believe that's also the case in Microsoft's Recall.

Winrecall confirmed that 'automatic snapshot capturing' had started, so I got on with some work to give it something worth recording. Ten minutes later, I checked its progress to find that it had already captured 36 snapshots (1 in our screenshot), which seemed like too many. I was also perturbed by the whirring noise my laptop was making, suggesting that Winrecall was using a lot of memory.

I paused the capture process but didn't see any snapshots until I started typing into the search box. This displayed them in a Results panel on the right-hand side 2. I searched for Windows 3 and Winrecall instantly showed a snapshot in the main window. This indeed contained the word 'Windows' in the title of a browser tab within the captured image.

Double-clicking the snapshot opened it full-size in my default image viewer, where I confirmed it had captured my entire screen. I was also able to see the text Winrecall had extracted from each screenshot, by hovering my cursor over the thumbnails in the Results panel.

Clicking the 'View results in Explorer' link opened the folder containing the images, while the 'Clear current session' button deleted them all. Less useful was the Timeline slider, which showed an error message when dragged.

I'm sure the real Windows Recall is much slicker than Winrecall, and lighter on resources, but I'm still uncomfortable with something silently recording in the background.

Without options to set the frequency of snapshots or filter the results by anything other than keywords, you end up with a lot of images to wade through – as well as the sense your whole screen is being watched.

Need help using Windows Recall? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to turn an old phone into a Wi-Fi

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